

CHINQUA-PENN PLANTATION: A PERMANENT, PRACTICAL HOUSE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Chinqua-Penn Plantation, a 1920s mansion located in the Piedmont of North Carolina. Once a private residence to Thomas Jefferson Penn and his wife, Beatrice Schoellkopf Penn, the home was donated to the State of North Carolina in the 1960s and was used as a historic house museum. After years of financial struggle caring for the house, the state chose to close the museum. The mansion, its outbuildings, and collection of decorative arts are now for sale.

Most previous treatments of Chinqua-Penn have formed upon curiosity and wonder at its unique exterior and eclectic furnishings. This thesis presents the home as a historic text from which information and insight may be gleaned. It progresses through examination of exterior architecture, floor plan, interior décor, and grounds. In each chapter, the house is compared to others from a similar time period.

This text presents a new system of classification for the spaces utilized within this domestic structure. It had previously been the norm to place areas of homes and their grounds within the categories of “public” and “private.” Chinqua-Penn contains myriad spaces used by owners, guests, and servants. The terms “civic,” “personal,” and “support” are used in this discussion to better relate the meaning of these areas for their occupants.

Of particular interest is the desire of the Penns to create a permanent home that was different from others. On the surface, the estate appears unique in its design and interior furnishings. Upon close inspection, it becomes clear that Chinqua-Penn has more in common with contemporary mansions than differences in its materials, separation of spaces, and décor.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I also thank my family, Jim, Camille, and Ben Lancaster, as well as my husband, Gus Peña, for their faith in me. In particular I appreciate Dad's editorial advice, Mom's willingness to go on field trips, and Gus's boundless optimism.

Thank you to my fellow students for their friendship and encouragement. I am especially grateful to my partner in crime, Jeanne Barnes.

This project would not be complete without the expertise of my committee. Thank you Dr. William Moore, Dr. Kathleen Berkeley, Dr. Frank Ainsley, and Dr. Virginia Stewart who provided support and encouragement for this project. I am also grateful for the good humor and assistance of Dr. Bill McCarthy.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and co-workers at Chinqua-Penn who fought the good fight.

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## INTRODUCTION

Chinqua-Penn Plantation is a 1920s country estate located in the piedmont of North Carolina. Built by tobacco executive Thomas Jefferson Penn and his wife, Niagara Falls Power heiress, Beatrice Schoellkopf Penn. The plantation comprised approximately 1,000 acres in its heyday. Although it featured an operating dairy farm, greenhouses, a clock tower, swimming pool, gardens, and all the trappings of an American country estate, the plantation's jewel was its 33,000 square foot mansion. The plantation served as a showcase for its wealthy and cosmopolitan owners.

Designed by New York architect Harry Creighton Ingalls, the mansion was constructed of oak logs and quartzite stones harvested from the surrounding area. The house's three wings created a floor plan shaped like a "Y." The Penns intended their two-story home to be a comfortable and permanent residence. Their choice of materials in tandem with the house's location and décor lent a provincial rusticity and charm to the place.

Though its large size is daunting, the house was not obtrusive to guests. Its long, low gabled roofline made it seem smaller. The three wings of the house reach out from the entrance to create an organic appearance, blending the structure with its surroundings. Ornamental foliage also contributes to the area and adds to the nestled quality of the home.

Each of the separate interior wings of the house had a unique function. The different areas represent varying degrees of public and private space for owners, guests, and employees. The floor plan and interior design of the house created a separation of spaces for the people who lived and worked in it. Trees and gardens surrounded the house. Carefully planned and



landscaped manicured gardens coupled with natural areas created varied spaces with differing looks and feelings throughout the property.

Following the death of its occupants, for which it was their private residence, Chinqua-Penn Plantation has functioned as a historic house museum. The mansion was constructed between 1923 and 1926 and remained a home until 1965 when the estate became the property of the State of North Carolina. It was opened to the public one year later.

Little has been written about the compound. The only published documents related to Chinqua-Penn were written during its years as a museum. A thesis written in 1970 by Cecelia Doreen Greenfield, a student at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, entitled “Designs for Lighting Selected Art Objects in the Interior of Chinqua-Penn Plantation in North Carolina,” is the only known scholarly work completed about the estate. This indicates the primary focus on the house initially was its use as a museum that exhibited decorative art objects. Its cultural value was located in the objects it housed. UNC Greensboro was the steward of the plantation after Betsy Penn relinquished ownership to the state in 1965, according to the specifications of her estate. The museum was closed once in the early 1980s due to budgetary constraints and was turned over to North Carolina State University. It was closed again in 1991 as a result of the state’s unwillingness to continue funding it. The Chinqua-Penn Foundation and North Carolina State University reopened it as a museum in 1996.

An article about the house and its contents appeared in *North Carolina State Alumni Magazine* in March 1988. Entitled, “Chinqua-Penn: A Collector’s Paradise of Artistic Oddities” and written by Bob Carrins, this work also reflects the dominant treatment of the plantation since it was turned over to the State of North Carolina. The house and grounds were considered a treasure trove of art objects to be admired, rather than a historical text to be examined. Carrins

interviewed Mrs. Penn's former chauffeur, Bob Boyles, and the couple's gardener, Charlie Talley. Carrins discussed a few of the prominent decorative art pieces in the house and related anecdotes about the Penns as recounted by Boyles and Talley. Emphasis was placed upon Jeff and Betsy Penn as collectors, entertainers, and employers. The house and objects within were treated as eclectic and intriguing pieces of art with little connection to larger cultural issues and trends.

Pamphlets and booklets for use by guests were also printed during Chinqua-Penn's early years as a museum. These documents outlined the layout and history of the house and grounds. One of the earliest was "Chinqua-Penn Plantation," published by NCSU in 1968.<sup>1</sup> Chinqua-Penn also appeared in an episode of an A&E television series entitled "America's Castles: University Estates."<sup>2</sup> In 1996, Susan Cline-Cordonier, then director of the estate, edited the first formal guidebook for visitors, "Chinqua-Penn Plantation."<sup>3</sup> The most complete publication about Chinqua-Penn to date, this guidebook briefly discusses the lives of Jeff and Betsy Penn, the creation of the plantation, its grounds, and interior. The book was written for tourists and provides a synopsis of what museum guests learned on tours. In her introduction, Cline-Cordonier posed several questions regarding the plantation. These included why the Penns chose the stone and log style for their home and what drove them to collect so many art objects from around the world. She indicated one might find the answers when visiting Chinqua-Penn. Her work, however, does not address these issues or attempt to answer the questions she poses. Like the article written by Bob Carrins, this book treats the house and grounds as they have been since the plantation's opening as a museum. The estate is intriguing and alluring, but the questions

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret McConnell Holt, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation, near Reidsville, North Carolina: the home of Thomas Jefferson Penn from 1923 to 1946*, (Raleigh: North Carolina State University Print Shop, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Cinetel Productions, *America's Castles: The University Estates*, (A & E Television, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996).

surrounding it have yet to be adequately addressed. Each document provides similar information with little analysis or placement of the plantation within larger historical or cultural contexts.

The estate is more than a collection of decorative art objects. Chinqua-Penn is a representation of the way its wealthy owners structured their surroundings. They used the house and grounds to denote status through access to the property and areas within it, as well as by ordering the experiences different people had at the plantation. The estate is a microcosm of the manner in which wealthy Americans in the early twentieth century viewed and shaped the world around them. The plantation is a reflection of 1920s American society as a whole as evidenced by its house, furnishings, and grounds.<sup>4</sup>

Chinqua-Penn represents a trend in twentieth-century America to build homes that appeared more rustic and less formal. Its architecture was part of a push to construct homes that were both inviting and worked with their surroundings. This unassuming exterior masked the tremendous scale of the house. Its façade clashed with the mansion's eclectic and highly stylized interior that followed standards of taste and class set forth in almost all other country houses of its time period. The opposing meanings conveyed by the exterior and interior of the home indicate the conflicting intentions of its owners. Outside, the home is humble and welcoming to guests, but conveys other messages to employees. The interior areas used by owners and guests are exquisitely decorated in a manner similar to other fine homes, while those used by employees are sparse and plain. These aspects provide a striking dichotomy in the way different people approached, experienced, and interacted within the place. Chinqua-Penn provides a way to observe the use of public and private interior and exterior space as it applied to the daily lives of its owners, guests, and servants.

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<sup>4</sup> Dell Upton notes such treatment in his work, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford, England; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Previous publications about the plantation have failed to address such issues and have not utilized the property as a cultural text. The house, its contents, and the grounds were treated as independent pieces of a whole that were important merely for their aesthetic value. This thesis will examine the mansion, its furnishings, and the grounds, with each unit functioning together to provide a greater understanding of the entire property. It will rely upon close descriptions of the house and surrounding land, and provide analysis of their form and function. The distinct spaces defined by the house's tripartite structure demonstrate three categories of space within it. These areas represent civic, personal, and support spaces. Such categories go beyond typical analyses of houses that rely primarily upon the differentiation between public and private spaces. These three terms are also applicable to other structures on the property. Civic areas refer to those used to entertain outsiders and guests. Personal places are reserved for the most private activities, typically located in secluded areas such as bedrooms and other intimate living spaces. Support areas are those used to assist the happenings in other settings, such as gardens for secondary entertaining, and the places occupied by servants who provided the physical labor necessary for the estate to function.

Material culture informs us of how the Penns structured their existence in ways that written documents are incapable of expressing.<sup>5</sup> The house and its surroundings provide the ultimate in material culture case studies as they are relatively unchanged since the time the Penns occupied the estate. Observations of this site will be coupled with comparisons to other early twentieth century American homes built by individuals of comparable social class. This will involve some of the descriptive methods used by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, as well as analytical tools devised by art historian Jules Prown.

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<sup>5</sup> This notion of material culture providing alternative insights into the lives of people is discussed by Henry Glassie in his essay, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," in Robert Blair St. George, ed. *Material Life in America: 1600-1860*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

Geertz and Prown prescribe ways of observing and analyzing objects. Methods employed by Geertz involve steeping oneself in a culture and becoming immersed in an object through what he calls thick description. Close observation leads to a deeper understanding of the “cultural expressions” and those involved with them. This causes the observer to evaluate the piece within its cultural context to learn how it functioned and was treated, thus providing a richer understanding than could be gleaned from more passive forms of study. Geertz believes people are located in webs of significance created by society. Within these webs are layers of signs and signals that convey meaning.<sup>6</sup> Prown’s approach also involves carefully looking at objects. He feels any object has the potential to provide new insights about the people who created and used it. Pieces of material culture provide evidence of a person or group’s underlying beliefs and ideas about the world. Such notions can be gleaned from the design of a piece, coupled with its placement within a larger historical context. Prown offers an art historian’s perspective to examining objects involving description, deduction, and speculation to derive the values and meanings within them. His methods provide new ways of thinking about artifacts as they reflect the larger society.<sup>7</sup> The examination of any item elicits what are initially basic observations. These lead to ideas and later more concrete discoveries about its purpose and use.

Close description and investigation of the plantation as a cultural text will provide novel insights that were neglected in earlier examinations. Interweaving description, history, and analysis will provide a more complete understanding of the plantation. This methodology will

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<sup>6</sup> Geertz’s methods including thick description are outlined in his essays. Chapter 1 “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” provides an introduction. Chapter 15 “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” is a case study exhibiting his methodology. Geertz published these in his work, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Prown’s methodology in utilizing material culture is found in his essay “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method” in Robert Blair St. George, ed. *Material Life in America: 1600-1860*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

not only answer previously unsolved questions, but will also provide new avenues of study. Such inquiry will not only reveal new meanings for Chinqua-Penn, but also about other significant American homes built in the early twentieth century, many of which have also been overlooked as sources for scholarly investigation. Discerning the way the wealthy ordered their lives will provide an understanding of how their peers as well as those of other social and racial classes existed within those environments.

Examination will proceed through four aspects of the property. It will begin with the exterior appearance of the mansion and will proceed to its floor plan. A discussion of the main house's interior décor will follow. The discussion will conclude with a description of the grounds and outbuildings of the estate.

## CHAPTER 1: EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

The cluster of two-story stone and log buildings on Wentworth Street in Reidsville, North Carolina, do not seem imposing to passers-by (see Figure 1). The structures are rustic and humble in their appearance and are congruous with the dwellings around them. They consist of brown-painted logs with stones interspersed between them. The dwellings are topped with gabled slate roofs. They resemble log cabins, but are larger and more permanent in appearance. Three of these lodges face the road, while others form a right angle and are perpendicular to the thoroughfare. A wrought iron gate connects the two largest structures facing the road and is covered with a roofline continuous with the previous ones. A smaller lodge is connected to the end of the one next to it, creating continuity with the others. Two similar dwellings attach to the opposite end of the others. This pair meets the others at a right angle. These appear connected to the first group. They face what is now a gravel parking lot and meet the other line of lodges at a right angle. Another gate is between these structures. The entryway between the buildings is covered with a roof. The lodge furthest from the road contains a clock tower made of stone with a slate roof. It rises above the roofs of the lodge buildings to which it connects.

These buildings served as a carriage house, laundry and pump house, and homes for some of the people employed on the property. They were the first residential structures erected on the rolling farmland that became Chinqua-Penn Plantation. Plans for what was referred to as the “entrance group” commenced in 1922.<sup>8</sup> They served as utilitarian structures for the estate as well as experimental methods of stone and log construction. Owner Jeff Penn wrote the group was built “with the direct purpose of experimenting with the Lodges, and the sincere hope of

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to H.L. Driscoll, Reidsville, North Carolina, 26 October 1922, transcript typed, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

trying to avoid the many mistakes in constructing these lodges with a real determination to avoid all such mistakes in building the house.”<sup>9</sup> These included using the wrong types of wood, leaky walls, and bad flashing on the roofs, as stated by Penn to his contractor, I.T Skinner.<sup>10</sup> The Penns hoped to find in constructing the lodges first, the best configuration of stones and logs to use in the main house.

The unpretentious lodges provided the first indication of what the owners and architects desired in the estate (see Figure 2). To passers-by and visitors approaching the plantation, the buildings were unobtrusive. Rather than grandiose and imposing walls, gates, and entryways, Chinqua-Penn had more natural hedges, stone and log lodges, and wrought iron gates. The effect was welcoming and unassuming and did not convey the scale of the estate or its main house.

The placement of logs and stones on the facades of the lodges is not uniform. The logs vary in size, but many are a foot or more in diameter. They lie horizontally in most places, but are vertical in others. Uneven ends of the logs extend from the corners where the sides of the lodges intersect. Flat sides of the gray stones are visible between some of the timbers. Jagged edges of stones jut out from between the logs in other areas. The stones vary in size and are smaller in some places, larger in others. Iron-rimmed windows are interspersed on the upper and lower levels of the lodges.

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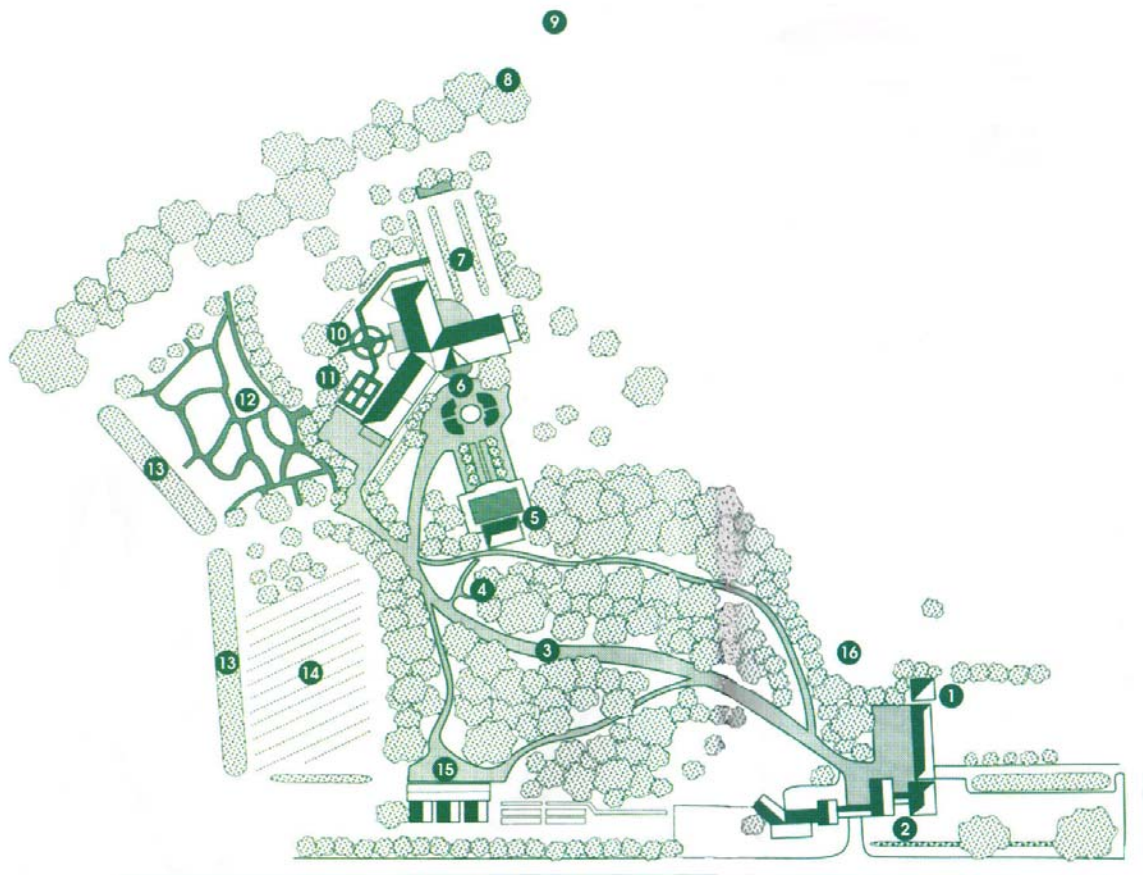
<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, “Simple Statement of Facts for the Careful Consideration of Contractor, December 1924,” photocopy, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.





Figure 1. Chiqua-Penn lodge group, Reidsville, North Carolina, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1926, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.



- |                          |                    |                        |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1. The Clock Tower       | 7. Formal Gardens  | 13. Grape Arbor        |
| 2. Lodge Group           | 8. Cemetery        | 14. Vegetable Garden   |
| 3. Stone Bridge Area     | 9. Windmill Site   | 15. Lutton Greenhouses |
| 4. Goldfish Pool         | 10. Rose Garden    | 16. Ha-Ha Wall         |
| 5. Chinese Pagoda Garden | 11. Herb Garden    |                        |
| 6. Mansion Entrance      | 12. Cutting Garden |                        |

Figure 2. Chinqua-Penn grounds, Reidsville, North Carolina, 1926, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

The buildings form an L shape with a wrought iron gate in the center of each side. The shape creates a hidden, private space inside the L approachable only through the gates. From this space covered stone steps lead to the second floor of the buildings that face the road. These steps are only accessible from inside the gates and are not visible from the outside. The second story of the other lodges is accessible from inside one of the structures and does not have exterior stairs. The building perpendicular to the road is built into a grassy hill. The side of the hill next to the structure is built up with a stone wall that curves around a courtyard area inside the corner of the L. A rear wing of one of the lodges that face the road further divides the space. It extends back into the courtyard area. One of the wrought iron gates leads to this area. This space is sheltered, concealed on all sides except where an opening in the wall occurs. As the wall curves, there is a crossroads. The two drives from the gates merge on the interior side of the buildings. They form one drive that curves slightly upward to another wrought iron gate decorated with chinquapins, owls, and squirrels. This drive leads into a wooded area.

The other section of lodges that face the road conceals a patio. It is behind a side of the L and is also only visible from inside the gates. Beyond the patio the ground rises, making it a sheltered space like the courtyard. These concealed areas are formal and provide one reason the log structures appear more substantial and elegant than typical log cabins. The slate roofs and windows also give a planned, structured appearance. The lodges represent an attempt to design formal structures that appear rustic and unassuming.

They provided a glimpse at what the main house 300 feet up the wooded drive looked like, but did not prepare visitors for the home's size. Penn and architect Harry Creighton Ingalls deemed these structures the proper venue for discerning the best methods of stone and log construction to employ in the plantation's mansion. The inconsistencies in the formation of

materials in the lodge group indicate the varied attempts at finding the proper façade for the house. In some places logs were placed vertically, in others, horizontally. The stones were laid with flat sides and edges out. Even the widths of the logs and their treatment varied on the lodges.

The elements of design and material in these early attempts reflect Penn's vision to create “a combination farmhouse-hunting lodge built out of rock and logs.”<sup>11</sup> From the earliest stages, the lodges were meant to blend with the environment. The rustic retreat desired was finally achieved with the native oak and quartzite readily available on the estate's property and surrounding countryside. The construction was to be of “rock and hand hewn logs on the outside – with the other three sides of the logs sawed – trying to make it conform with that country there ...”<sup>12</sup> The stones and timbers were the earliest and most crucial aspects of construction. They set the tone for how the buildings, and later the mansion, were received by guests. Several letters and telegrams were exchanged with architects and contractors regarding the materials. Penn discussed the importance of using straight, properly sawed logs. In his letters, Penn demonstrated his early wishes to be involved in all aspects of design and construction. He wrote, “I must maintain ... sawing these logs on both sides gives us much better building material – gives us a much better chance to do the chinking properly ... allows the logs to cure as they should by nature ...”<sup>13</sup> His desire for the best materials and practices is evident in numerous ranting letters. He demanded perfection and for tasks to be completed to his specifications. At one point Penn was particularly dismayed with his surveyor I.M. Skinner. In

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to J. Van Lindley Nursery Company, Pomona, North Carolina, 11 October 1922, transcript typed, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to I. N. Court, New York, New York, 3 November 1922, transcript typed, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, 23 December 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

a letter to architect Harry Creighton Ingalls, Penn wrote, "... He has left off specifications, bids for contracts ... I have made up my mind that Mr. Skinner goes this week ... something must be done and done now, to get this job going and going right."<sup>14</sup> Penn had exacting standards and expected nothing less from those working on his home. Construction of the plantation took years and was subject to Penn's perfectionism.

The architectural firm employed to design the lodges and main house had extensive experience with fine homes and buildings, but had never constructed gigantic log homes in the rural South. Harry Creighton Ingalls secured the commission for his New York firm. I.N. Court, an associate in Harry Creighton Ingalls and Company was the first architect involved with the Penns.

The firm was best known for the creation of grandiose private homes, theaters, and other public buildings. Court was selected to design the house because his brother Raymond was a friend of Jeff Penn.<sup>15</sup> Ingalls co-designed the Little Plaza Theater on West 44<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, as well as other projects as far away as Florida. Most significantly, Ingalls was the on-site architect for the construction of Vizcaya, the famed Florida estate of James Deering.<sup>16</sup> The firm's ability to produce impressive structures a substantial distance away from their New York offices was proven. They were also likely experienced with handling wealthy and demanding individuals, like Penn, who expected perfect results in their projects.

Correspondence between I.N. Court and the then unmarried Beatrice Schwill and Jeff Penn commenced in the fall of 1922. A letter from H.C. Ingalls to Jeff Penn dated November 10,

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Reidsville, North Carolina, to Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, 25 July 1925, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>15</sup> Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, to Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, 10 November 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>16</sup> Doris B. Littlefield, Miami, Florida, to C.R. Walton, Reidsville, North Carolina, 7 September 1993, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

1922 announced Court's unexpected death, which threatened to derail the project in Reidsville. Though it was early in the planning phases, much information and discussion with the Penns transpired prior to Court's death. Ingalls made clear his desire to continue the project in Court's place. Penn responded, "... frankly, I am having other architects to make preliminary drawings also, but it is further felt that you have come nearer in reaching the practical possibilities than any other architect so far ..."<sup>17</sup> After some deliberation, the Penns agreed to allow Ingalls to continue with the design and construction of their home. Much time, energy, and money would have been wasted otherwise.

Ingalls was born in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1876. He studied in Boston and also at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Ingalls worked in New York in his early years as an architect, where his first major projects were theaters. He worked with Paul B. Allan on the Henry Miller Theatre in 1918. Residential designs came mainly in the later stages of his career. Ingalls created country houses on Long Island as well as in Florida. He worked with Francis Burrall Hoffman on several projects, including Vizcaya and thus developed expertise with estates and country houses.<sup>18</sup> Ingalls had a proven track record and could deliver the style and comfort wealthy Americans expected in their homes. His sensibilities and extensive background made Ingalls a suitable choice despite his apparent lack of experience with the stone and log design required by the Penns.

Jeff Penn's wish for a permanent, practical house meshed with his notions of using native materials to allow the home to fit its surroundings. The 33,000 square foot house he created with his architects was grander in scope than such initial desires indicate. During the early planning stages Ingalls wrote, "Both Court and I fully realize what you are trying to accomplish in this

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, 9 December 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>18</sup> Architectural Forum, 63 (August 1936), 315.

place, and understand thoroughly that you wish something different from what has been done, and yet something which will be appropriate both to your living needs and the country in which it is to be built.”<sup>19</sup> What Penn wanted was what he deemed a comfortable home that was not like anything his contemporaries had. In his “Simple Statement of Facts for the Careful Consideration of the Contractor,” Penn wrote, “... this proposed residence is NOT to be either an Adirondack camp, or a California bungalow, or a Southern log cabin. It is a permanent, practical house.”<sup>20</sup> Despite his statement, elements of each of these architectural styles were built into his mansion.

Adirondack camps were constructed in remote locations in the United States as destinations for the wealthy. The style originated in the Adirondacks of New York and later spread to other regions. It began with the construction of lodges and camps in the mid to late nineteenth century. Vacationing Americans admired the styles of these retreats and the country in which they were located. William West Durant is credited with erecting the first of such camps. Architect Alfred L. Donaldson referred to these places as "Camp Beautiful." The buildings were made of logs and stones from local areas and were situated in picturesque settings that served as retreats for the rich. The buildings erected varied in size with differing numbers of stories and porches. Spruce logs were typically used and were left natural or stripped. The walls were not painted, but roofs could be red, green, or stained. A rustic and natural look was desired, though the buildings were often massive in size. Decorative touches were often added including

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, 9 December 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, “Simple Statement of Facts for the Careful Consideration of Contractor, December 1924,” photocopy, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

carved and bent pieces of wood as well as trim and ironwork.<sup>21</sup> Exposed beams and stone fireplaces were found inside the structures and were complemented by simple decors.

It is thought approximately 2,000 camps were constructed in the United States by 1908.<sup>22</sup> The houses gave the appearance of roughing it, but many had the size and modern conveniences of urban mansions. The use of natural building materials was duplicated in Chinqua-Penn's façade, while its décor was more opulent than its Adirondack counterparts. However, the use of native stones and logs was also utilized in its interior. Many of the floors of the house contain stones. Paneled walls consisting of roughly hewn logs and finely finished planks adorn many of the spaces as well. The contradiction of rustic façade and décor with tremendous size and amenities is a commonality between Chinqua-Penn and Adirondack camps. The natural setting, away from cities is also evidenced in both. Solitude among picturesque hills, mountains, and forests was paramount to camps. Chinqua-Penn is located in the rolling hills on the outskirts of a small North Carolina town.

Another element Penn hoped to avoid, the bungalow style was popular during the 1920s. Many of these small family homes emerged in the South, after their appearance in California as a byproduct of European and Indian styles. Bungalows were typically small, simple, inexpensive structures, often built from patterns rather than individually designed. Bungalows arose from an Indian term and were initially built in England. The roots of bungalows in America are vacation homes built in warm climates.<sup>23</sup> They began as simple, breezy, open dwellings with a central hall and front porch that adhered well to casual, outdoor life. Sumner Greene and Henry Mather

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<sup>21</sup> Aslet, Clive *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 202-209.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony D. King *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1984), 127-128.



were the initial architects of California bungalows.<sup>24</sup> During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, wealthy Americans sometimes referred to their homes as bungalows.<sup>25</sup> The Reynolds family of Winston-Salem, North Carolina jokingly referred to their 1917 home as “the bungalow” though it contained 64 rooms.<sup>26</sup> The house’s modest exterior lacked much ornamentation and thus resembled a gigantic bungalow in its relatively plain facade. Wealthy families such as the Reynolds and Penns were able to create country homes that contradicted trends of modernity. The bungalows’ style appealed to the desire of wealthy Americans to live in safe, comfortable havens, reflective more of the past than the future.<sup>27</sup>

The log cabins Penn mentioned were likely southern vernacular buildings. These were found in the Piedmont region of North Carolina where he grew up. Split log or clapboard one and two story homes from as early as the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century still stood in Upland Virginia and North Carolina in the early twentieth century and continue to dot the landscape to the present. The buildings typically had simple gabled roofs. Some also had covered porches. Most were small and practical dwellings.<sup>28</sup> Log cabins have also been associated with mountainous and secluded areas, and all typically associated with humble, lower income families. Chinqua-Penn shared a rural setting and log construction with these buildings. However, the mansion was more sophisticated and much larger than other log structures. It was also professionally designed, unlike many of its vernacular counterparts located in the region. Penn likely wished to avoid a completely rural and unadorned house and wanted something more unique than a log cabin. Like bungalows, cabins represent architecture from the American past.

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<sup>24</sup> Clay Lancaster *The American Bungalow, 1880-1930* (New York: Abbeville Press 1985), 116.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Temple, “There’s No Place Like a Bungalow Home,” *USA Today*, 20 September 2002, sec. D, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Mayer *Reynolda: A History of an American Country House* (Winston-Salem, NC: Reynolda House, Museum of American Art 1997), 52.

<sup>27</sup> Leland Roth *American Architecture: A History* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Dell Upton *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America* (Wiley 1995), 54-59.

They are associated with pioneers, rural life, and heroes such as Daniel Boone and Abraham Lincoln. The size, partial stone facades, patios, balconies, and gardens of Chinqua-Penn's manor house prevented it from looking like a typical log cabin. However, its style alludes to the cozy, rustic images conjured by log cabins.

The Penns' house was placed at the end of the estate's 300' drive, on the highest point of the property. Though its location was prominent, the home does not appear grandiose from the outside (see Figure 3). It looks rustic and serene, like the lodges at the bottom of the drive. Despite Penn's wishes, the mansion has the porches, balconies, and setting of an Adirondack camp and the building materials of an overgrown southern log cabin. The lodges served their purpose as experimental structures as the wood and stone of the house is uniformly placed. In the house, all the logs are horizontal with only the flat sides of the quartzite visible. Like the lodges, the house has a slate gabled roof.

The manor house stretches across the upper portion of the property. Its Y shape is not detectable when viewing it from the front. Only the front sides of two of the branches are visible. From the front of the house, the left front wing of the Y extends toward visitors coming up the drive toward the home. The extreme end of this branch is only one story, but the rest of it is two stories high. Its low end as well as a gabled roof diminish the appearance of this wing. This branch meets the center of the Y at the front entrance to the house. The double doorway is placed on a stone landing with steps leading up to it. A two story stone façade surrounds the entryway. The letters "J" and "B", which stand for "Jeff" and "Betsy", are set into the stone far above the door near the dormer of the roof. The entrance is set slightly in front of the wings adjacent to it. Though there are trees to the right of the entrance and further down the drive to the left, this entrance is not hidden by them. It stands out not only because of its location and the

use of steps, stone, and roofline, but also because the sunlight hits this tall, light colored entrance space. Its brightness makes it appear more prominent and attractive than other areas of the house. The left wing has four sets of French doors set on a level patio area below the entrance. A few steps on the side of the porch lead to this area. Beyond the doors are windows on the first floor, and above it are dormer windows on the second floor. The right wing on the other side of the entryway is two stories high. The lower level consists of a stone patio enclosed by stone supports and shaded by the overhanging story above it. This space is also accessible from stone steps on the side of the porch. Stone columns on the exterior portion of the patio support the upper story. This story consists of stone and horizontal log construction interspersed with windows at regular intervals. The patio curves around the right side of the building and reveals an outdoor fireplace on the short side of the right wing. The rear portion faces the back of the property and reveals an uncovered patio placed against a massive two-story bay window (see Figure 3).

Directly behind the main entrance, on the backside of the Y is a dance terrace beyond a picture window. A straight line can be drawn from this window to the front door. One side of the patio meets the rear wing of the house. This wing is not visible from the front of the house, but runs perpendicular to it. A doorway leads into this wing from the dance terrace. Additional windows are located along this wing on both of its two stories. The short end of the back wing has a small stone covered porch with steps leading down into the yard. This side consists primarily of a stone façade. The other side of the rear wing has more windows as well as another patio. It is above ground with steps leading to it and begins narrowly along the wall. This portion has a series of French doors with glass panels leading into the house and stone benches outside. The walkway becomes a larger patio when this side gives way to the next wing.



a.



b.

Figure 3. a.) Chinqua-Penn manor house under construction, front view, Reidsville, NC, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1923-1926, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.  
b.) Chinqua-Penn manor house under construction, back view, Reidsville, NC, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1923-1926, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

The next wing, which is the left wing if viewed from the front of the house, adjoins the patio. Near the corner between the wings is a door that leads inside the house from the patio. More windows are placed along both stories of this wing. This part of the wing protrudes outward, with the rest of it hidden from view until one walks around it. A stairway next to this side leads below ground to the basement. The end of the wing holds a screened porch with steps leading down to a courtyard below the ground level of the back of the house.

The porch provides a sheltered area below it in the courtyard. Two double doors are located below the porch at the end of this side. Two other doors are placed on the wall adjacent to the double doors. The courtyard is similar to the one near the lodges. A stone wall surrounds it on all sides, creating a private space. The walls on each side of the courtyard narrow into a drive that curves and exits the courtyard. This drive joins the main drive and creates a fork at the top of the driveway leading uphill from the lodges. This second entrance at the end of the left wing is not visible from the driveway. It is on the back of the house and is hidden from view. The portion of the drive that extends to this area curves behind shrubs and between stone walls. This area forks from the main drive and no guest could mistake it for the way to the front of the house. One has to break from the driveway's gentle curve upward and to the right in order to access the back entrance. It was reserved for deliveries and was the way employees entered the house. The double doors below the screened porch led to basement storage areas for vehicles, foods, and other items. This part of the house was primarily used by workers and servants and was not noticed or used by guests to the home. It was strictly utilized for the daily business of running the mansion.

Just as this rear portion of the house is hidden from view, the front of that wing is less prominent than other exterior areas. This wing is the first part of the house that guests passed

when they approached the main entrance. The end of this left wing that faces the driveway is constructed of logs interspersed with stones. It contains simple windows and does not have a stone area or other decorations. This section also has a low profile and thus blends with the surrounding trees more than the central entrance, which has prominent front steps with a stone façade and double doors. This branch's predominantly dark wood façade camouflages it. This left wing is also lower on the lot than the central portion and right wing of the house. The exteriors of the house that encase the sections inhabited by owners and guests are more prominent and attractive than this wing that was used by employees.

Less important sections of houses are hidden in other large American homes as well. The placement of servants' wings in less visible locations was common in the 1920s. This is reflected in the exterior of Chinqua-Penn as this section of the house is the least visible. It indicates the desire of the owners to conceal the spaces used by servants and also serves to diminish their importance. This is evident in Meadowmere, a home constructed in 1910 in Southampton, NY (see Figure 4).<sup>29</sup> From the outside, the right wing of the house is placed at a right angle with the rest of the structure. This wing contains food preparation areas on the first floor and servants' quarters on the second floor. It is removed from the main section of the house and appears tacked on to the end of the structure, almost as an afterthought. The wing diverges from the rest of the house, appearing a separate entity. This treatment of servant working and living spaces is common in early twentieth century architecture.

The Frederick Patterson House provides another example (see Figure 5). The house was built for the Patterson family in Dayton, Ohio in 1925. The kitchen, butler's pantry, and valet room are at one end of the first floor. The servants' quarters are above these rooms on the

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<sup>29</sup> Robert B. MacKay, Anthony K. Baker and Carol A. Traynor, eds. *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*. (New York: W.W. Norton 1997), 55-56.

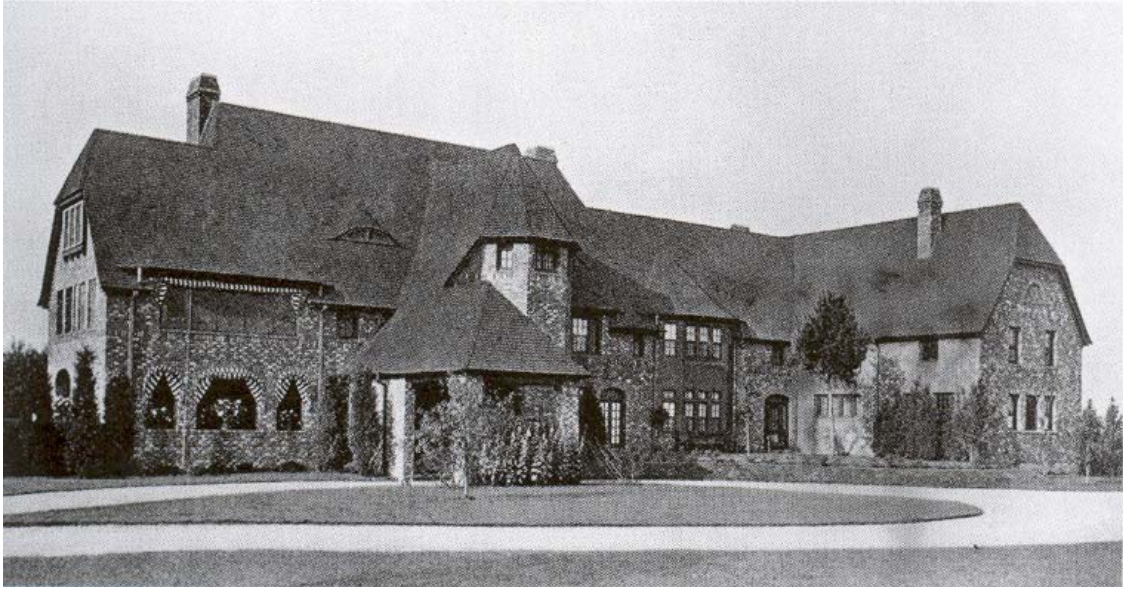


Figure 4. Meadowmere, Southampton, New York, Grosvenor Atterbury, H.G. Trevor Residence, 1910. *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*.





Figure 5. Frederick Patterson House, Dayton, Ohio, architect unknown, 1925, *source unavailable*.



second floor. An outside service court is next to this wing. It is not visible from the front entrance to the house as it is hidden by the servants' wing. As in other cases, servants' spaces were set apart from those used by owners and guests. Their exterior entrances were also blocked from view.

Like the other houses, the shape of the mansion at Chinqua-Penn and its orientation on the property were formed to shape social distinctions. Though Penn initially expressed great interest in such details as windows and doors, Ingalls wrote him that those things were "really quite minor at this stage, but the orientation of the house, the relation of one room to another, the question of service, the approximate size and location of the rooms ... are major."<sup>30</sup> As a professional, Ingalls clearly understood the need to provide the proper location of rooms and servant access. Concerns about where the servants lived, worked, and were able to interact with their employers were of major importance to designers and owners.

Though other homes follow similar techniques of concealment of certain spaces, the architectural style of most prominent American homes differs markedly from Chinqua-Penn. Most American country houses do not resemble oversized log cabins and though placed in rural areas, most were close to larger cities. They were located predominantly outside large industrial centers in the northeastern United States. Country houses were also built near southern cities like Atlanta, as well as in sought-after vacation spots like Miami and Palm Beach. Others, like George W. Vanderbilt's Biltmore, in the mountains of North Carolina, were placed in more remote places. Penn argued his home "is not a country residence in the fact that it is only twelve minutes from the central part of Reidsville, by motor, and can be reached easier and quicker ...

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, 9 December 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

than the average construction in ... Baltimore, Richmond, or Atlanta.”<sup>31</sup> Reidsville was a small farming town, hardly in the same league as those communities to which Penn compared it. Despite his insistence regarding its placement near a relatively large city, Chinqua-Penn resembled a country house in its rural location and features.

Country houses of this time were retreats from the hustle and bustle of city life. It was customary for wealthy Americans to build country homes to escape the turmoil of rapid industrialization and growth occurring in cities. As architectural historian Leland Roth argues, “Such houses were a defense against what is now sometimes called future shock; they were safe and secure refuges in a culture in rapid flux.”<sup>32</sup> These homes were typically located outside major metropolitan areas like New York City. Those who owned such estates had businesses in cities, but wanted retreats. As country escapes, these homes had sprawling lawns, gardens, and outbuildings. They provided a stark contrast to city blocks and traffic. A middle ground was found by the 1890s, when some mansions were still built in cities, but more were placed outside them in growing suburbia.<sup>33</sup> Their owners had access to a lifestyle outside metropolises that was not available to less wealthy individuals. The ability to escape the city depended upon transportation and time away from work to which few but the rich had access.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, Americans built smaller homes than they had previously.<sup>34</sup> Some of the more affluent Americans however still built mansions for their country retreats into the 1930s.<sup>35</sup> While the manor house at Chinqua-Penn was not small at

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<sup>31</sup> Jeff Penn, *Simple Statement of Facts for the Careful Consideration of Contractor*. Chinqua-Penn archives, Reidsville, North Carolina: December 1924.

<sup>32</sup> Leland Roth *American Architecture: A History*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2001), 352.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Gowans *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press 1986), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Robert B. MacKay, Anthony K. Baker and Carol A. Traynor, eds. *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*. (New York: W.W. Norton 1997), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Mayer Reynolda: *A History of an American Country House* (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Reynolda House, Museum of American Art 1997), xiii.

33,000 square feet, it was diminutive in comparison with some of the palatial mansions constructed in earlier decades, such as Biltmore. It also differed from most country houses, as it was a permanent residence rather than a vacation home.

Though it resembled an American log cabin in its use of materials, the scale of Chinqua-Penn's manor house, coupled with its use of wood and stone, fenestration, and placement of balconies and patios could claim European roots. According to Leland Roth, many of the American country houses built in the early twentieth century represented a blend of European styles including English, Spanish, and French.<sup>36</sup> Wood was a common and popular building material in Europe. Some American architects in the late nineteenth century believed wood was a truly natural material that would eventually allow the construction of homes that would be distinctly American. Others feared the economic fluctuations in the cost of wood and its potential loss to fire. Some theorists also suggested that because of its combustible nature, wood was most appropriate for vacation homes.<sup>37</sup> Elements of these styles lent themselves well to the organic and rustic appearance typified by Chinqua-Penn. The use of stones and wood made such houses blend with the environment and appear from the outside to be welcoming and comfortable rather than grandiose and imposing. Chinqua-Penn has both European elements and a unique style of stone and log construction that makes it American.

Other contemporary houses demonstrate these architectural trends. Prominent American families like the Vanderbilts and Morgans constructed most of their homes in the northern United States. The retreats were close to the metropolitan centers where family businesses were located. Many resembled elements found in Chinqua-Penn in their architecture and interior décor.

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<sup>36</sup> Leland Roth *American Architecture: A History*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2001), 351-352.

<sup>37</sup> David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 273, 275.

Lawridge is one such house with architectural elements reminiscent of European country houses (see Figure 6). Built in Port Chester, New York in 1921, it has the same low, sprawling quality as Chinqua-Penn.<sup>38</sup> Stones were used on its façade and a slate roof topped it. Turrets and double chimneys convey the home's European influence. The façade's natural-colored building materials are covered with vines, making the house appear nestled on its lot. Its low profile and progression of spaces contribute to its serene appearance. The house differs from American Colonial and Federal types that looked like inorganic boxes.<sup>39</sup> Lawridge has separate branches and wings that appear to grow from the entrance of the house in a way similar to Chinqua-Penn, while still maintaining a large and luxurious size.

The Frederick Patterson House is another organic mansion with European architectural roots (see Figure 5). It is mainly constructed of brick and has a slate roof. It has a low roofline that peaks at the entrance in a way similar to the house at Chinqua-Penn. The home boasts towers and bay windows, reminiscent of English architecture. It also has various wings radiating from a prominent entrance. Like Lawridge, this house appears to spread outward from its entrance. Both buildings have the same comfortable, rustic quality as Chinqua-Penn but are still mansions with highly decorated interiors. No amount of styling can erase the scale of these homes.

Skylands Farm, built in Sterlington, NY, in 1929, evidences a façade that is also stylized and European (see Figure 7).<sup>40</sup> It has Tudor roots with bricks interspersed with

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<sup>38</sup> Leland Roth *American Architecture: A History*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2001).

<sup>39</sup> James Deetz discusses forms and their meanings in his text, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archeology of Early American Life*.

<sup>40</sup> Aslet, Clive *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).



Figure 6. Lawridge, Port Chester, New York, architect unknown, 1921, *source unavailable*.

timbers, multiple chimneys, and a gabled roof. Like the manor house at Chinqua-Penn, this one has elements that help it blend with its surroundings. The roofline also provides the organic, unassuming quality found in both homes. Though Skylands appears larger than the house at Chinqua-Penn, it retains some similar qualities.

Reynolda House is a country home built closer to Chinqua-Penn, in Winston Salem, North Carolina (see Figure 8). It was completed in 1917. Reynolda does not exemplify one particular style, but is most influenced by the Colonial Revival movement. According to Reynolda author Barbara Mayer, from the front, the house has a “long, low roofline and recessed porches, the central block of Reynolda House gave the impression of being an extra-large bungalow from the front.”<sup>41</sup> A central, prominent front section gives way to two recessed and angled wings on either side. This adds to the unobtrusive long, sweeping quality of the house. The house also has a foundation of fieldstones.<sup>42</sup> The Reynolds, a family like the Penns, sought a home that while large, was comfortable and not pretentious. They also employed some native materials in its construction by using fieldstones.

Another prominent North Carolina country house was built in Asheville much earlier than Reynolda and Chinqua-Penn. Biltmore was constructed for members of the Vanderbilt family from 1888 to 1895 (see Figure 9). Designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt, Biltmore is the largest private residence in America and boasts 255 rooms. The mansion's architecture was based on French chateaux. Like the previously mentioned homes, Biltmore's architecture has roots in European styles. This is where the

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<sup>41</sup> Barbara Mayer *Reynolda: A History of an American Country House* (Winston-Salem, NC: Reynolda House, Museum of American Art 1997), 52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.



Figure 7. Skylands Farm, Sterlington, New York, John Russell Pope, 1929, *The American Country House*.



Figure 8. Reynolda House, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Charles Barton, 1917, [www.reynoldahouse.org](http://www.reynoldahouse.org).





Figure 9. Biltmore, Asheville, North Carolina, Richard Morris Hunt, 1885-1895, <[www.biltmore.com](http://www.biltmore.com)>.

architectural similarities end. The elements employed and desired effect for Biltmore were much different from those of Chinqua-Penn. Its size and ornate façade dominate the landscape around it, rather than blending with its surroundings. The house sits on the crest of a hill and is visible from miles away. The impressive and substantial French Renaissance style might convey the power and wealth it took for Vanderbilt to conquer the mountains and countryside to construct such a house.<sup>43</sup> Biltmore was clearly meant to be an imposing and impressive home, conveying riches and dominance in its ornate and grandiose facade.

Chinqua-Penn also differs from the typical southern mansions from whence it borrowed its name: plantations. Plantation houses are usually associated with Georgian and Federalist architecture. They are typically box-shaped with porches and columns. These structures are made of a variety of materials including clapboard, stucco, and brick. The shape and materials of such houses make them much different from the main house at Chinqua-Penn. Few could be described as low in stature, sprawling, or with multiple long wings. The Penns coined the name “plantation” for their home sometime after construction commenced, perhaps based solely on its location in the South. Use of the word “plantation” is misleading as the house and grounds were never a functioning plantation, and were constructed much later than its namesakes. The property was previously called Corn Jug Farm. The manor house represents a rejection of early twentieth-century trends toward neo-plantation classicist styles.

Chinqua-Penn’s main house appears inviting, but not in the same way for all who approach it. Owners and guests entered the house from the front (see Figure 10). Visitors came to the house from the uphill drive. The stone and log façade was welcoming and impressive in a way appropriate for its rustic appearance. Guests were important, and thus entered the house at

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<sup>43</sup> Clive Aslet *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 8.



Figure 10. Chiqua-Penn manor house front entrance, Reidsville, North Carolina, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1996, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.

its most prominent point: the front, central entrance, surrounded by stone with steps leading up to it. The location and detail of the entrance indicates its use by worthy and significant individuals. The durability and strength of rock and wood also indicate the house and owner's stability and power. Employees and those doing business with them likely entered the mansion through its rear entrance. They followed the break in the driveway up to the house through a secluded, walled path to a concealed courtyard. At this point they climbed a flight of stone steps to a covered screened porch. The placement and concealment of the drive indicates that those who used it were to be hidden as well. They did not enter the front area of the house, but the rear, far end of it. Such individuals were out of sight to any who might be in the front or central portions of the house. Their entrance was much simpler and unadorned in its construction, indicating the status of the people who used it. These people were servants and workers who performed their duties largely out of sight of the Penns and their guests.

The exterior of the house reflects the sensibilities of Mr. Penn more than those of Mrs. Penn. The architecture is reflective of the rugged North Carolina countryside in which it is located. This area was Penn's childhood home. Thomas Jefferson Penn was born on February 24, 1875 to Frank Reid Penn and Annie Spencer Penn in Penn's Store, Virginia. The family moved to Reidsville shortly after his birth. Penn's father started the family business, the Penn Tobacco Company. The Penn family was prominent in America since the eighteenth century; Jeff was related to North Carolinian John Penn, who signed the Declaration of Independence.<sup>44</sup>

Jeff Penn had ten brothers and sisters, though only five of them survived to adulthood. Jeff's younger brother Frank R. Penn Jr., died in a tragic hunting accident in 1895.<sup>45</sup> Jeff

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<sup>44</sup> Carolyn Brady, from family trees compiled by Lynn Richmond Bernhardt and Peggy Penn Weitnauer, "Relationship of Jeff Penn to William Penn and John Penn", 9 September 1997, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>45</sup> *Weekly Review*, Reidsville, Nov. 29, 1895.

attended college at the University of Virginia from 1893 until 1895, though he apparently did not graduate.<sup>46</sup> Penn's education coupled with his small town tobacco roots provides a dichotomy. Like other men in his family, Penn maintained ties to Reidsville as well as New York. He also enjoyed a fast and glamorous lifestyle of world travel that took him far from his hometown. These discrepancies are reflected in the at once rustic exterior as opposed to the ornate and luxurious interior of Penn's home. Penn's education leant itself to his career as a businessman, though he always enjoyed his time in Reidsville. Much of his wealth came from the Penn family cash crop: tobacco.

The Penn family operated the F. R. Penn Tobacco Company until it was sold to the American Tobacco Company in 1911. Jeff Penn's brother Charles served as the Executive Vice President of the American Tobacco Company. He maintained a residence in New York on Park Avenue as well as one in Reidsville while he was employed with the company. According to his son, Frank R. Penn, "Daddy would leave Reidsville Sunday afternoon and get to New York the next morning. And then he'd leave New York Thursday afternoon and get back here Friday morning."<sup>47</sup> Executives in the family, like Charles, lived double lives. During the week they were entrenched in the cosmopolitan business scene of New York. They typically spent off hours in their more relaxed hometown of Reidsville. The duality of cosmopolitan and local lifestyles is evident in the architecture and décor of Chinqua-Penn. Jeff Penn worked for the American Tobacco Company and the F. R. Penn Company as a sales representative from 1895 until 1914. He traveled extensively in this capacity and maintained offices in New York City, Buffalo, and Reidsville. Penn spent many of his early years working in tobacco sales on the West Coast and

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<sup>46</sup> Card from UVA alumni directory, typed and handwritten notes indicate Penn attended UVA from 1893-1895, notes his addresses and death, Alumni Records, University of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>47</sup> Frank R. Penn, interview by Audrey Michie, 7 February 1995, typed transcript, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

was in San Francisco for the earthquake of 1906.<sup>48</sup> Jeff Penn's house reflects his rural roots in its stone and log exterior, while his affinity for the glamour of big city life is evident in its opulent furnishings.

Jeff Penn moved to Buffalo, New York in 1915 where he worked in investments for Gardner, Penn & Company. At this time he married Genevieve Schoellkopf vom Berge, a widow with a three-year-old son, Henry. She wed her first husband, Henry Schoellkopf vom Berge in 1907.<sup>49</sup> Vom Berge died of typhoid fever in 1911. Genevieve was a cousin of Betsy Schoellkopf and her brother Paul. The couple had houses on Chapin Parkway and on the lake in Wanakah, NY.<sup>50</sup> Mr. Penn retired from Gardner, Penn & Company on December 31, 1920.<sup>51</sup> He was also a director of the Niagara Falls Power Company in March of 1921. Betsy Penn's first husband, Julius Schwill, was also on the Board of Directors and her brother Paul was President of the Board.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Penn and Schoellkopf families had ties before Jeff Penn and Betsy Schoellkopf married. Additionally, Penn's sister, Mattie Irwin Penn married Paul Schoellkopf Sr. in 1911.<sup>53</sup> Such connections likely provided the first introduction between Mr. and Mrs. Penn.

Though Jeff and Genevieve had three children, none survived to adulthood. Jefferson was born in 1916 and died in infancy. Spencer, the only child who survived, was born in 1917 and died from polio before his fifth birthday. Genevieve contracted influenza and died from the

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<sup>48</sup> Dianne Gwynn. *The Schoellkopfs, 1842-1994: A Family History*, (New York: NFMCC Foundation, 1995), 52.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>51</sup> Retirement announcement, apparently mailed to interested parties, 31 December 1920, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>52</sup> Audrey Michie, biographical sketch of Thomas Jefferson Penn, 4 July 1994, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>53</sup> Hazzan, Julie Robinson, "The Schoellkopf-Vom Berge Manor." Page from the website "Buffalo as an Architectural Museum." 27 October 2004 <<http://ah.bfn.org/a/chapin/121/121hist/121hist.html>>.

disease in 1919, as did their newborn daughter Mary Jane.<sup>54</sup> This second decade of the twentieth century was a difficult one for Jeff Penn. His father died in 1914 and his mother passed in 1917.<sup>55</sup> He stayed in Buffalo after his wife's death and raised Genevieve's son, Henry. Henry visited but did not live at Chinqua-Penn with Jeff Penn and his second wife.<sup>56</sup> The death of Jeff Penn's wife and children may provide one reason he and Betsy Penn decided to leave Buffalo and live in North Carolina.

Most reports cite Betsy Penn's desire to escape harsh northern winters as the reason the couple left Buffalo.<sup>57</sup> This may not be the only reason the couple relocated. Mrs. Penn's family was prominent in Buffalo politics and community endeavors. Her accomplishments were mediocre in comparison to those of her relatives. Mrs. Penn's grandfather, Jacob Schoellkopf, made millions in the tanning industry, purchased the Niagara Falls hydraulic canal, and was the first to harness the power of the falls for electricity.<sup>58</sup> Her family was also heavily involved in politics and community service. The Schoellkopfs were well known and influential in their city. Buffalo was also more cosmopolitan than Reidsville, and closer to major social scenes like that of New York City. The Penn family was easily the wealthiest and most well known in Reidsville.

In this small, southern town, Betsy Penn found the status she could never achieve in Buffalo. She arrived in the South at a time when women became heavily involved in clubs and services to aid their communities.<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Penn began Reidsville's first Community Chest

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<sup>54</sup> Audrey Michie, "Profile" (of Thomas Jefferson Penn), archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Dianne Gwynn. *The Schoellkopfs, 1842-1994: A Family History*, (New York: NFMCC Foundation, 1995), 40.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>58</sup> Hazzan, Julie Robinson, "The Schoellkopf-Vom Berge Manor." Page from the website "Buffalo as an Architectural Museum." 27 October 2004 <<http://ah.bfn.org/a/chapin/121/121hist/121hist.html>>.

<sup>59</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 217.

chapter, which later became the area's United Way. She also held some of the club's meetings at Chinqua-Penn. Mrs. Penn introduced Reidsville to Girl Scouts and also gave time to the local Red Cross. She was involved in numerous organizations and charities prior to moving to Reidsville.<sup>60</sup> Taking these interests up in Reidsville allowed Mrs. Penn to wield more control and enjoy more prominence than in the larger, more established organizations of Chicago and Buffalo. The stature enjoyed by Mr. Penn and gained by Mrs. Penn once she moved to Reidsville, was attained more easily there than it might have been in Buffalo.

Jeff Penn's work and financial interests were closely tied to the community in Reidsville. He had a large Holstein farm on property where the estate was built. Penn was a farmer and a businessman. His family's involvement with tobacco was lucrative and granted Penn prestige in Reidsville as well as opportunities to travel. He was also Chairman of the Board of Directors of the First National Bank of Reidsville and a member of the community's Masonic lodge.<sup>61</sup> Penn family roots ran deep in the piedmont of North Carolina.

Jeff and Betsy Penn decided to build their home on Penn family land the year before the couple married. Construction plans for Chinqua-Penn Plantation began the year before Jeff and Betsy Penn married on October 9, 1923.<sup>62</sup> The Penns resided in the Belvidere Hotel in Reidsville during construction of their home. The couple moved onto the property in 1925 and lived in a gatehouse lodge building until a portion of the house was prepared for habitation. The couple spent their first night in the house on December 19, 1925.<sup>63</sup> Although the Penns were

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<sup>60</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 11.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Audrey Michie, "Profile" (of Thomas Jefferson Penn), Archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>63</sup> Dianne Gwynn. *The Schoellkops, 1842-1994: A Family History*, (New York: NFMMC Foundation, 1995), 53.



closely involved with the construction of their home, they were away traveling for a portion of those years.

The contradiction of the materials and exterior features of the house with its size and floor plan represents a disparity in both the Penns' backgrounds. Though Mr. Penn had rural roots in southern Virginia and North Carolina, his family was prominent in politics for centuries. Perhaps this stature is the reason he named his home a plantation. Penn farmed and his money came from tobacco, but though the business began as a small family endeavor, it created tremendous wealth. It also gave Penn the opportunity to attend college, live in different regions of United States, and travel the world. Thus the exterior speaks to his rural roots while the interior adheres to the standards of wealthy, educated and well-traveled Americans. This opulent décor represents one facet of Mr. Penn's life and a more complete picture of the lifestyle Mrs. Penn was accustomed to before she moved to Reidsville. Mr. Penn became this type of citizen while his wife was born into a family of people who had long since enjoyed and showcased their wealth and status.

## CHAPTER 2: FLOOR PLAN

The manor house's floor plan reflects these opposing facets of the Penns. It also exhibits the manipulation of space employed by wealthy Americans to create differing degrees of public and private areas for the dissimilar people who lived and worked in them. Such homes acted as machines that sorted classes and types of people into their respective physical and social places. The house was constructed in a "Y" shape with three distinct branches, each serving different purposes (see Figures 11 and 12). The most private areas were at the extreme ends of two of the branches, radiating from the front and central more public portions of the house.

When guests enter the front door of the house, they are met with its most public spaces. These were largely used for entertainment, and are thus characterized as civic areas. These locations are where the Penns built community. A gentleman's room on the right, and a ladies' powder room on the left flank the foyer. Beyond this space is an entry hall with the main living room adjacent to it on the left. This living room boasts a 35' ceiling with the second level open to the library above it. The velvet or music room and front guest bedroom are near the library. A doorway at the back of the library leads to a promenade that looks down into the living room. A concealed staircase at the end of the balcony leads into the living room. Servants may have used these stairs, but their location in the back of the living rooms suggests otherwise. Once down the stairs, one has to cross through the entire living room and cannot be hidden from view. This is also the case upstairs. To access the balcony and steps, one has to pass through the library, a smaller space, in full view of its occupants. It is unlikely the Penns desired for their servants to be so conspicuous as to use these spaces. They were thus interesting architectural

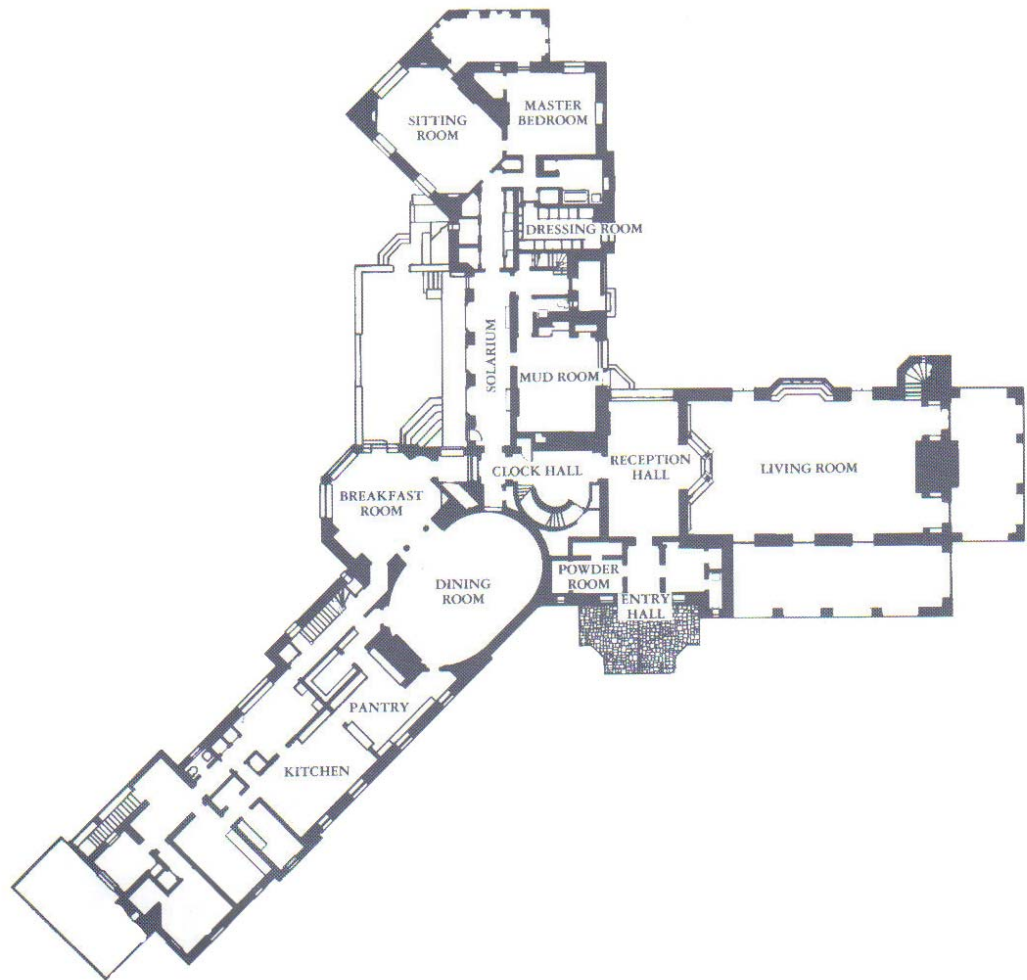


Figure 11. Chiqua-Penn manor house first floor, Reidsville, North Carolina, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1923, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.

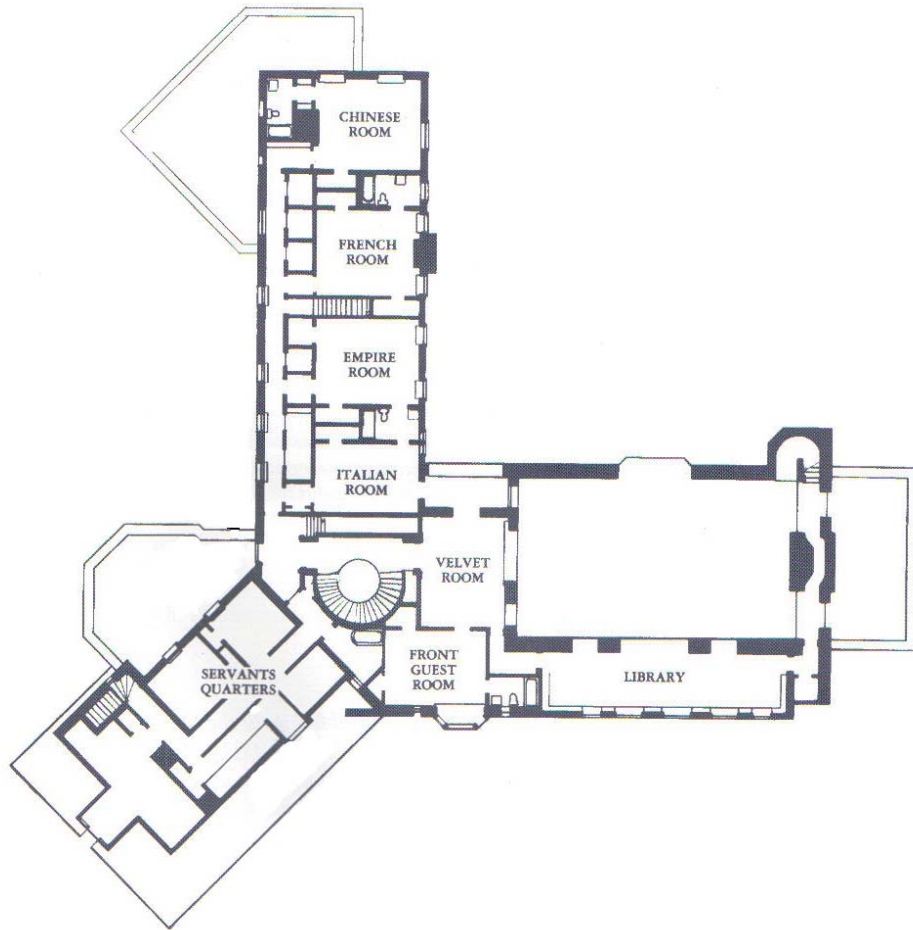


Figure 12. Chinqua-Penn manor house second floor, Reidsville, North Carolina, Harry Creighton Ingalls, 1923, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

features reminiscent of European castles and manor houses that were probably enjoyed by the Penns.

The library and living room were seen and utilized by guests. The rooms were entertaining spaces and thus, easy access between them was probably desired. The stairs between the rooms are much closer than the main staircase. To reach the main stairs, one has to exit the living room, cross the entry hall to the stair hall, climb the stairs, walk through the velvet room, and proceed down a small hallway to the library. The concealed staircase provides simpler and more convenient access between the rooms. It is also an interesting architectural feature that represents the Penns' knowledge of European architecture and antiquities.

The main stair hall is located on the opposite side of the entry hall. It connects this wing of the house with the others at the crux of the Y. The other front wing of the Y, visible on the outside from the driveway, consists of public and private spaces. The rooms progress from the center of the Y from most public to increasingly private. They also shift from rooms used by guests and owners primarily for entertaining, to those used by employees. The rooms also change from civic to support and personal spaces. Two rooms adjoin with separate entryways at the crux of the Y. The room facing the front of the property is the formal dining room. The smaller room next to it that faces the rear gardens is the breakfast room. The dining room was used for formal entertaining as well as some of the Penns' meals. The breakfast room was also used for smaller gatherings and family meals, in addition to the couple's breakfasts. These were civic spaces as they were primarily used to entertain guests.

The butler's pantry is beyond the dining room. Two doors on either end of the dining room enter separate sides of the butler's pantry. This room has a large walk in closet within it. The breakfast room gives way to a narrow hall that runs parallel to the butler's pantry. The hall

widens to reveal a room with a small back staircase. The end of this room narrows into a short hall with a bathroom and door onto the back porch. The room is parallel to the kitchen that proceeds from the butler's pantry. The end of the kitchen also narrows to a small hallway with a utility room on the side facing the front of the property and a smaller closet opposite it. The servants' dining room is located at the end of the hall. This room also has a door that leads outside to the back porch. Another door off the porch is located next to this one. It leads to an apartment with a main room, smaller bedroom, and bathroom. The porch has four sides. One contains the door at the end of the rear hallway. Another has two doors, one that enters the servants' dining room and another that enters the apartment. The third side has a doorway to a small bedroom or storage room. The fourth side is covered in wire screen and has a doorway that leads down an exterior flight of stairs into the courtyard below.

The second floor of this wing is devoted entirely to servants' living spaces. These are among the most private and personal areas for employees in the house. The upper level stair hall proceeds to a space that leads to the back wing of the house on one end and the servants' hallway on the other end. The door to the servants' hallway is positioned next to the opening of the room that leads to the stair hall. The long hallway is not straight, but has two turns in it. The hall continues through this entire wing with rooms on either side. A bathroom is located at the first turn. It has a window that looks down on the front driveway. This front side of the hallway also has a large closet and sewing and storage room. Two similarly sized and shaped bedrooms are across the hall from these spaces. The hall turns right beyond these rooms. A larger bedroom is located on this portion of the hall. It is at the end of this upper level of the wing. The end of the hall past this bedroom leads to the back staircase.

From the front of the house, the servants' wing extends toward those coming up the drive, but it is not the focal point of the house. The end of the wing containing the servants' dining room and back porch is one story and thus has a lower profile than the other end of the house where the main living room and upstairs library are located. That part of the Y, to the right of the front door, is two stories and more easily attracts the attention of those approaching the house. This indicates this portion of the house was seen and used by guests, while the servants' wing disappeared and was inconspicuous, just as the servants were.

Though employees were mainly kept out of sight, there is no evidence that they were mistreated. The Penns employed white workers as maids, butlers, chauffeurs, and other positions in the house, as well as for work on the grounds. Loyalty of staff was evidently not an issue at Chinqua-Penn. According to an advertisement for a maid or butler, "We have had our chauffeur and maid – one from Sweden and the other a Swiss some 12-15 years."<sup>64</sup> The advertisement further stated that the person hired as a chambermaid or butler enjoyed a private bathroom. They likely lived in the apartment off the back porch at the end of the servants' wing of the house. According to the advertisement, "All the scouring - - all the laundry - - all the window cleaning – all the fire building is done by colored help – but you are to distinctly understand they are not to wait on you."<sup>65</sup> The Penns were adamant that no employee served another employee. The seeming equality of this point is tarnished. The black help did the dirty work and hard labor in the house while whites waited on the Penns. Nevertheless, divisions of class and status clearly occurred within the ranks of servants, as was the case in other country houses. A private bath, separated from the servants' quarters was a perk reserved for a typically white employee of high stature, such as a butler or maid.

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, advertisement for work, 1930, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

The placement of the servants' wing at one end of the house was not uncommon in the 1920s. In fact, many of the mansions constructed at this time were Georgian or otherwise roughly square in shape, with a separate wing added on to the house, almost appearing as an afterthought. In other cases, houses with several wings typically had servants' areas at the end of one wing, removed from the living spaces of owners and guests. The Frederick Patterson house located in Dayton, Ohio is one such example (see Figure 13). The house has an entrance area at the center with a wing of formal living spaces on one end, with the dining spaces near the center and servants' areas proceeding out from the dining area. From the formal dining room spaces progress from the children's room to the butler's pantry, kitchen, and servant living spaces. Upstairs, the master and guest rooms occupy one end of the house, while the children, then governess, then servants' rooms are at the other.

Meadowmere evidences another floor plan constructed like Chinqua-Penn's (see Figure 14). This plan moves in a similar fashion from public to private and master to servant areas. The entrance and center of the first floor contain the living and dining areas with the dining room giving way to the butler's pantry, kitchen, and servants' rooms. The servant areas look like a separate portion of the house that appears almost tacked onto the main part of the building. Upstairs, the master and guest bedrooms occupy the main portion of the house with the servants' much smaller bedrooms placed in a more remote, separate wing of the house.<sup>66</sup>

This indicates that while servants were respected enough to be part of the house itself, they were relegated to second-class treatment and placed as far away from the owners and their guests as possible. The most casual and intimate spaces occupied by these people were generally the furthest away from the center of the house. A clear procession from most elegant and public

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<sup>66</sup> Robert B. MacKay, Anthony K. Baker and Carol A. Traynor, eds. *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*. (New York: W.W. Norton 1997), 55-56.



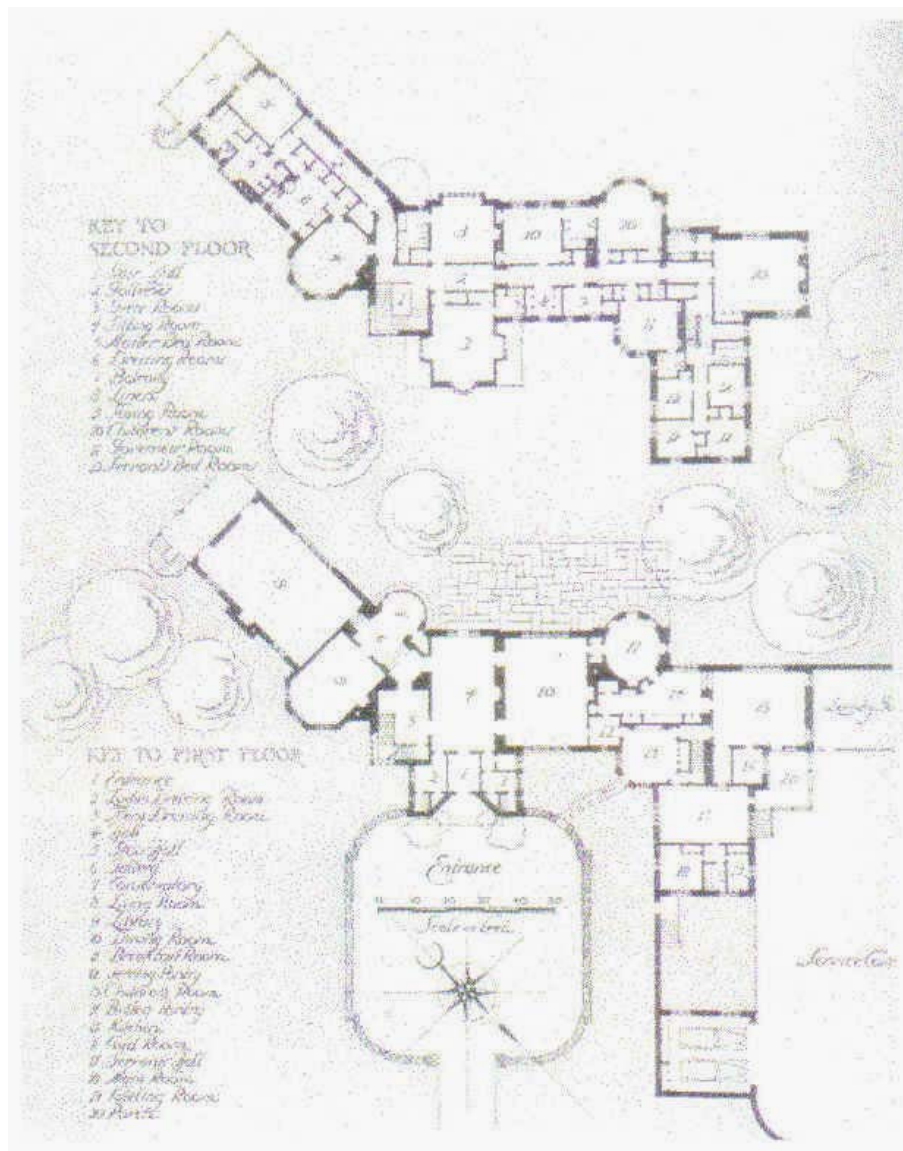
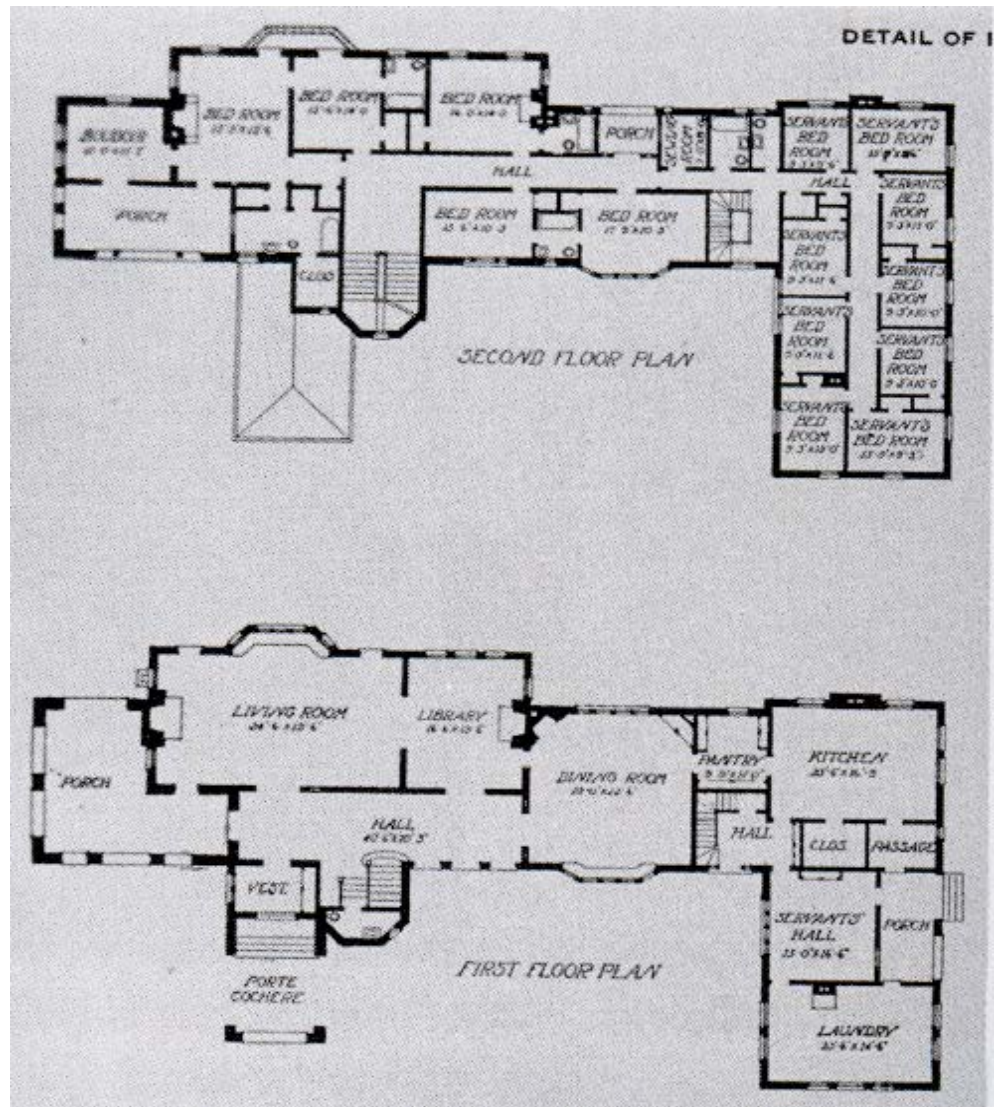


Figure 13. Frederick Patterson House floor plan, Dayton, Ohio, architect unknown, 1925, source unavailable.



to increasingly private is evident in the placement of the rooms at Chinqua-Penn. The butler's pantry and kitchen give way to dining and social spaces which are located the furthest from the owners' domain. The rooms used to maintain the daily life of the owners, such as the kitchen and butler's pantry connected to the most private servants' areas. In their use and location, these support spaces were most removed from the Penns' lives. The upstairs bedrooms and other rooms used by servants also indicate this progression. The rooms are located down a winding hall, behind a door that was likely kept closed, hiding the area from view.

This separation was planned. The placement of rooms was discussed in early phases of floor plan design for the mansion. In a letter dated November 9, 1922, Ingalls told Penn, "We have not overlooked the fact that the bedroom quarters of the house were quite a distance from the service part and pretty well cut off by the living room, and this point had been giving me personally considerable concern."<sup>67</sup> The issue was not so much the distance from one space to another. It was rather the difficult access between them. Ingalls stated in his initial plans that he attempted to "provide a means for the servants to get from the servant's quarters to the bedroom quarters without passing through the living room ... I am very glad that we are now working on another scheme ... which would permit of better and proper contact between service and bedrooms in a private manner."<sup>68</sup> Servants performed their duties incognito, out of the view of employees and guests. The location of their work and residential spaces in hidden and remote places demonstrates this point. It was necessary for the servants' living spaces as well as their work to be out of sight.

Privacy was not only paramount for keeping the servants at arm's length, but it was also a necessity for the owners of mansions. Chinqua-Penn was no exception. The remaining wing of

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<sup>67</sup> Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, to Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, 9 November 1922, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

the house is located in the rear of the building, perpendicular to the front. It represents the most secluded and private portions of the home. Like the previous wing, this area proceeds from somewhat private to most private. It extends from the crux of the wings along the solarium hallway. The mudroom is the first room off the solarium. A window and door lead outside to the dance terrace. The room is small and it was used for entertaining intimate groups of family and close friends. This room is a step away from the more formal dining and living spaces in other areas of the house and is thus on a continuum between civic and private spaces.

A door that leads to a portion of the house referred to in the blueprints as the owners' suite is at the end of the solarium hallway. The owners' suite is the most personal space in the house used by Mr. and Mrs. Penn. Its location and décor attest to this. The door opens onto a narrow hall with closets on each side. The end of the hall reveals another doorway. This opens into the sitting room. It is oriented to the left of the doorway while the master bedroom is accessible through a door within the sitting room or a separate smaller hallway off the main one. There is a circular flow from the sitting room, to the bedroom, to a short hall with a bathroom and dressing room. The door that opens back onto the hallway into the suite is located across from the bathroom. The sitting room is much smaller in scale than its formal counterpart, the main living room. The bedroom is also more intimate in size with low ceilings and human proportions. Mrs. Penn's dressing room is next to the bathroom behind another door. It seems nestled within the suite, providing an increased degree of privacy. These rooms share a covered stone back porch that overlooks the gardens behind the house.

The placement of these rooms at the extreme rear of the house indicates their private quality. A series of doors isolates this suite from the rest of the house. One or both of the doors could be closed to create even more seclusion. The suite is also at the end of the rear wing of the

house. It faces the back gardens, rather than the front drive. It is furthest from the civic spaces and front entrance. The progression from sitting room to bedroom, bathroom, and dressing room further denote increasingly intimate space. The small size of the rooms and their distance from areas of the house occupied by others including guests and servants, also adds to their level of privacy and seclusion.

The personal area affording the most privacy for guests is located above this section of the house. Outside the hallway leading to the owners' suite is a stairway that leads upstairs to the guest bedroom hallway. This hall extends from a room outside the second floor stair hall through the entire upper level of the rear wing. The hall has windows that face the back of the property on one side with doors to bedrooms and closets along the opposite side. There are three guest bedrooms along the hall with two baths between them. A fourth bedroom with its own bathroom is located at the end of the hall. These rooms were used only for guests and were never lived in by residents of the estate.

The size and space of this hallway and its rooms contrast sharply with that of the servants' wing. Guests had private bathrooms located within their rooms. Servants shared one bathroom off a common hall. Guest rooms open onto a hall filled with windows facing the back of the property. The servants' hall winds along the interior of the wing and has no windows. Rooms on one side of the hall face the front of the property, while bedrooms on the other side face the back. Conversely, all of the guest bedrooms, bathrooms, and even the hallway have views of the gardens in the back part of the property. The guests' personal spaces were somewhat more secluded than those of servants and came with controllable levels of privacy with double-door entries.

A basement runs beneath the house and covers the same distance as the house's main floor. It has numerous support spaces that dealt with technical aspects of the home's daily operation. Other rooms served in support capacities of different kinds. These include a silver vault, walk-in freezer, wine cellar, movie screening room, and a room that housed the Skinner organ pipes. The Penns likely entered few of these spaces except for the screening room. Not only did the couple bring home objects from their travels, but they also documented them with reels of film that have survived. The screening room was a civic space in which the Penns regaled guests with images and stories about their trips abroad. Most of the other spaces in the basement were support areas used by servants to store and maintain items used in the house.

The treatment of different people and the placement of the spaces they occupy at Chinqua-Penn reflects the familiarity of the Penns and their architects with larger trends in the early twentieth century. Privacy was important not only for owners and guests, but also servants. As much as the wealthy did not wish to be disturbed by servants, their employees likely enjoyed working and living in separate areas, undisturbed. Nevertheless, the decision to place servants' areas in remote locations was not made by the employees but by the homeowners and architects. As evidenced at Chinqua-Penn, the placement of these personal and support spaces was not haphazard, but highly methodical and deliberate. Despite the likely desire of everyone in houses like Chinqua-Penn to have their own space, the areas were not equal in size or décor.

## CHAPTER 3: INTERIOR DECOR

The interior décor of the house at Chinqua-Penn also suggests a segregation of spaces that builds upon the distinctions evidenced in the floor plan. The size and placement of rooms within the house provides one level of separation between personal, civic, and support spaces. The decorative treatment of rooms used by owners and guests provides another means of differentiation, and largely contrasts with the exterior appearance of the house.

A comparison of the main living room, mud room, and private sitting room illustrates this point. The living room is large and opulently decorated (see Figures 15 and 16). It is 55' long, 28' wide, and has a 35' ceiling. The far end of the room represents the end of one wing of the house. It has a massive stone fireplace with a Flemish tapestry depicting Moses receiving the Ten Commandments hanging above it. Arched doorways with alcoves behind them flank the fireplace. Two wrought iron balconies are located on either side of the tapestry. The rear stairway previously mentioned is recessed in the wall and accessed from above by this balcony. The promenade and stairwell are decorated in Spanish tiles. The walls are covered in Pecky cypress and green painted plaster. The upper portion of two of the walls has wrought iron balconies. The ceiling consists of exposed hand-painted beams with a Scandinavian design. Ornate Chinese lanterns hang from the beams. Tiles that depict the story of Don Quixote cover part of the entry area's walls and steps. Balconies on one wall reveal the library behind them. French doors leading to an outdoor porch are located beneath the balconies. A massive bay window that reaches the ceiling is opposite this wall. The room evokes the styles of several countries. Spanish influence is evident in the plastered walls, iron balconies, and tile, while the





Figure 15. Chiqua-Penn manor house formal living room, Reidsville, North Carolina, 1996, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.



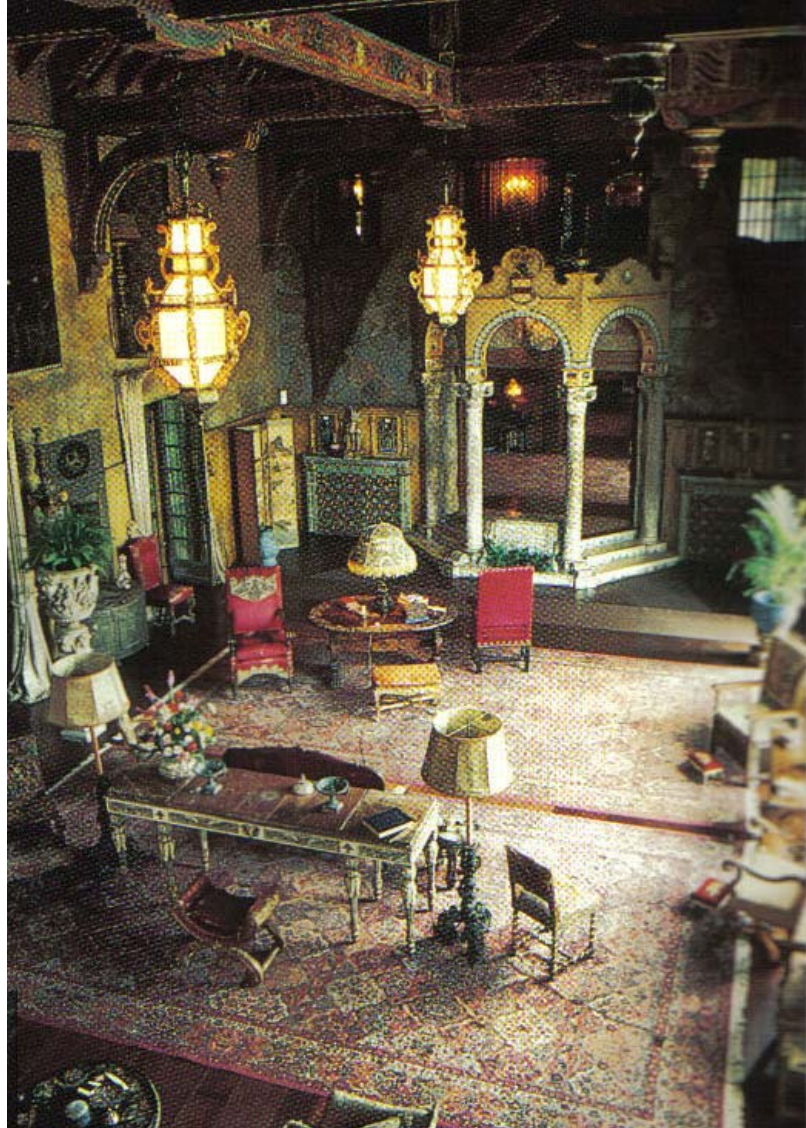


Figure 16. Chinqua-Penn manor house formal living room (from above), Reidsville, North Carolina, 1996, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

ceiling represents Scandinavian art and design. The Chinese lanterns add another layer of culture as do the French doors and two-story bay window.

Such extravagant furnishings indicate the Penns' intent to present their home as a showcase of their wealth and heritage. The couple had the means to travel and purchased pieces of art to convey this ability. The use of European decorative elements such as the Spanish tiles and balconies, as well as the concealed staircase like those found in ancient castles, indicates the Penns' passion for aristocratic elements of other cultures. Though they purchased items from around the world, the careful European influence in this space conveys an affiliation with royalty and prestige. In furnishing their home in such an opulent manner, the Penns further purchased their own authority in Reidsville. They affirmed their status to the community and wealthy friends and family from more metropolitan areas by decorating civic spaces like the main living room in this manner.

Impressive pieces of decorative art appear in the living room. A 6' tall Spanish Madonna with a sterling silver halo stands on the mantle. Groupings of furniture include chairs and sofas covered in brocade and tapestries, two eighteenth-century Venetian commodes, and a sixteenth century Italian marble-topped table. Delftware vases, silver Egyptian bowls and tools, and other objects are also placed around the room. Such pieces further contributed to the Penns' dominance in Reidsville. They also pointed to larger American trends. Americans were able to travel around the world with an air of entitlement following World War I. The economic and political dominance of the United States created an empire of consumption for its aristocratic citizens. Like their friends and peers, the Penns felt it was their right to acquire the treasures of

other nations and amass them in their home. The artifacts were like relics of fallen people and conveyed the power of America and its wealthy citizens.<sup>69</sup>

The size of the main living room also indicates its use as a civic space. It is the largest room in the house. The floor is lower in this room than in the entry hall. Guests have to step down into the room, passing through an entrance canopy supported by ornate Italian stone columns to enter it. This entrance creates a sense of drama and prestige for those invited into the space. It resembles a court of royalty rather than a private home. Some of the more impressive aspects of the room are not visible within it. The Penns' Skinner pipe organ is one such feature. It is located upstairs in the velvet or music room. The organ's pipes were placed in the basement. Grates in the floor allowed the notes to carry into the room. Organs, like the Skinner pipe organ were very expensive and represented the taste and sophistication of their owners.<sup>70</sup> Such instruments were used for entertaining, but also conveyed a sense of wealth and prestige to guests. The living room is also located near the front door and was thus a focal point for people visiting the house. It was used to entertain guests and was not of primary importance to the personal, daily lives of the Penns. This formal room is similar to a feudal great room within which the Penns received their guests as the lord and lady of their manor. They clearly wanted to impress those who visited their home with such a grandiose and richly decorated decor. The room provides the first indication of the wealth and sophistication of its owners and acts as the main civic space in the home.

Other key civic spaces located near the center of the house are the formal dining room and breakfast room. The formal dining room is oval shaped with Swedish pine walls (see Figure 17). The pine ceiling is paneled and contains carvings of chinquapin plants. It has a wood floor

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<sup>69</sup> Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 119.

<sup>70</sup> Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 97.

that was originally covered with a rug. One long side of the room has French doors that open outside to the front drive. The opposite wall contains reverse-painted mirrored glass French doors that separate this room from the breakfast room. The end of the room closest to the kitchen and butler's pantry has a fireplace with a portrait of Mrs. Penn above it. Swinging doors that lead to the butler's pantry are on both sides of the fireplace. The dining room has a 13' long Duncan Phyfe table with twelve eighteenth-century English chairs. The short side opposite the fireplace contains an English Regency breakfront with various dishes and pieces of fine porcelain. Electrified crystal wall sconces adorn the wall. These decorations further promote the Penns' money and affinity for European styles in the civic spaces of their home.

The dining room is one of several portions of the home that were professionally decorated. A prominent decorating firm from Atlanta, W.E. Browne, provided early rugs and curtains.<sup>71</sup> Elsie Adams was the Penn's interior designer. According to Mrs. Penn, Elsie Adams considered it "the finest dining room she has ever done."<sup>72</sup> She came once or twice a year to touch up or alter her work, but little is known about her background or other projects.<sup>73</sup>

The adjoining breakfast room conveys sophistication as well as whimsy. One wall is covered in windows on the upper half with flower boxes below and in front of them. The ceiling has a false skylight. Hand-painted panels of the seasons outline the rest of the ceiling. There are columns against the walls, painted to match them. Italian images of gods and goddesses adorn the other walls. The floor consists of mosaic tile. The Italian and Greek inspired designs further contribute to the Penns' participation in the American empire of consumption as world travelers

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<sup>71</sup> Brevard Williams, Atlanta, Georgia, to Beatrice Schoellkopf Penn, New York, New York, 26 September 1925, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>72</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 23.

<sup>73</sup> Bob Boyles, interview by Audrey Michie, 7 July 1994, typed transcript, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

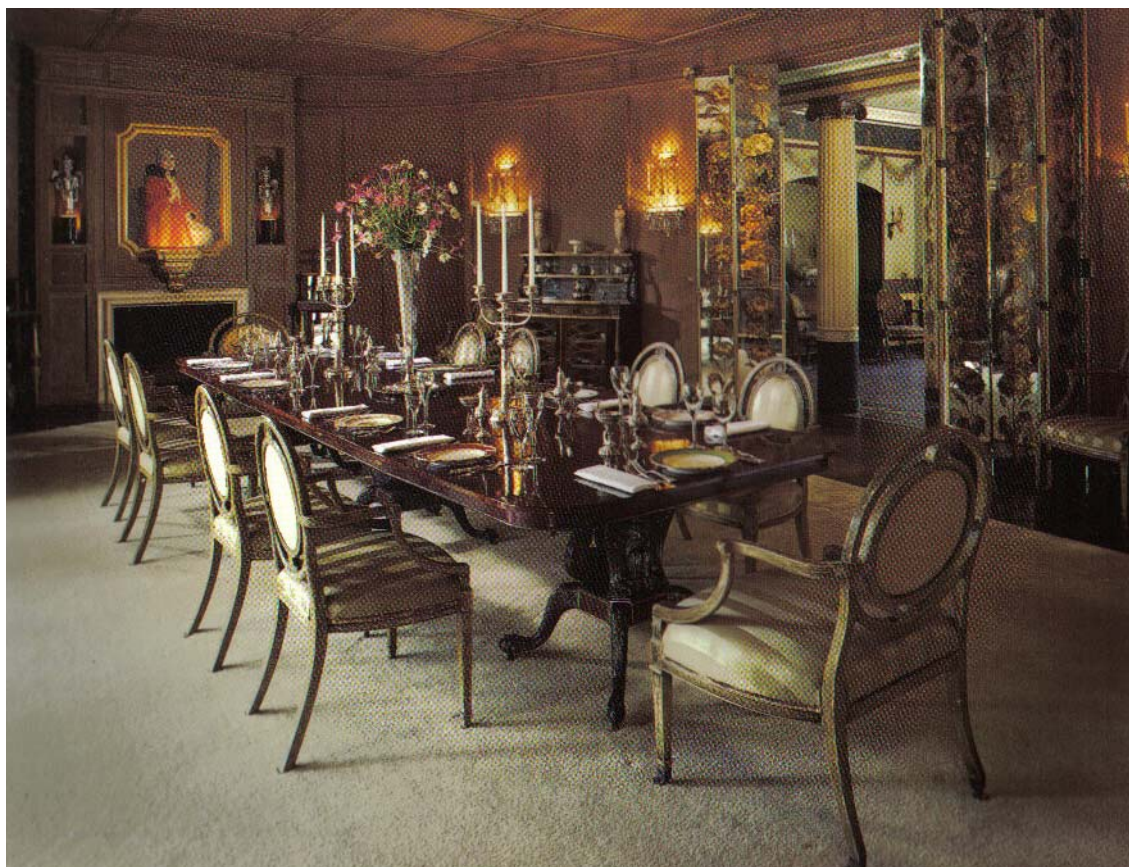


Figure 17. Chinqua-Penn manor house formal dining room, Reidsville, North Carolina, 1996, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

and connoisseurs. During their home's construction, the couple even brought an Italian painter, Pompeo Coccia, to Reidsville to do the paintings. In a letter to Mr. Penn, Coccia wrote, "I imagine that the columns in the angles must give a sense of grandeur and antiquity to the room; between the columns, in the center of the partitions I would put the dancers, which would be different ..."<sup>74</sup> The opulence desired by the Penns was clearly conveyed to Coccia. Only the Penns and their guests enjoyed dining in the grandeur of this space once it was completed. In addition to having some meals in the breakfast room, Mrs. Penn spent time with staff members there every morning to plan meals and events.<sup>75</sup> There Mrs. Penn was still in her civic area, but invited staff for an audience with her. Other than this interaction and service and cleaning duties, servants did not spend time in these areas.

The Penns had two places to dine. The breakfast room was used for morning meals and small gatherings. During family holidays, the breakfast room was often the children's room while adults ate in the formal dining room. The dining room was also used for the Penns' dinners as well as more elegant events. The formal dining room and breakfast room differ markedly from the servants' dining room. They are close to the center of the house and are thus more visible and easily accessible than the servants' dining room. Two people had a formal dining room and breakfast room to choose from while their numerous servants had one small, remote, unadorned room in which to eat their meals.<sup>76</sup> Part of the difference is indicated in the use of the rooms. The Penns' dining areas were civic spaces while the servants' were used for personal and support activities that contributed to the operation of the house.

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<sup>74</sup> Pompeo Coccia, Rome, Italy, to Thomas Jefferson Penn, Paris, France, 19 April 1925, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>75</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 22.

<sup>76</sup> It is unclear precisely how many servants the Penns employed. Sources indicate the number ranged from 5 to 10 depending upon the time of year and point in the house's history. Certainly when entertaining and for holidays, the couple may have employed more servants. When Mrs. Penn lived in the house alone, the number likely decreased.



The mud room is located on another wing of the mansion, in a more remote location. It is halfway down the solarium hallway with a normal-sized doorway rather than the more impressive entrance into the main living room. The mud room is smaller and more intimate. It has stone and log walls, a stone floor, and a one-story log ceiling. The side opposite the entrance has a window and door that leads outside onto the dance terrace. One end of the room has a built-in bar made of a Swedish chest that was cut to fit the space. The opposite end has a stone fireplace. The room reflects a level of rusticity and comfort that is similar to the exterior of the house. It was used to entertain small numbers of guests, especially close family and friends and is thus a private space. Drinking and card playing were typical activities. The room's size and décor indicate its use for small, casual events. Its eclectic furnishings also denote its use as more of a private space instead of a completely civic one.

The room is furnished with a large wooden table and chairs, an Italian cart that was turned into a sofa, a leather gentleman's chair, and numerous artifacts and pieces of art. These include a Zulu warrior's shield, English hunting horn, and various pieces of barware. Decorative objects adorn every wall, from floor to ceiling. The construction of the room coupled with the decorative elements and size make it feel cozy and cluttered. In an interview Mrs. Penn stated, "The carpenters thought we were a little bit crazy because it was built of these logs and looks similar to the exterior of a tobacco barn. But that is what we liked and that is why we built it."<sup>77</sup> This is evidently not the only style the Penns liked, but references their desire for a "practical" home that blended with its environment. The room also reflects the sensibilities of a comfortable, family space as opposed to the more public and grand main living room. This

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<sup>77</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 25.

denotes the room's classification as a personal space, secondary for entertaining to the formal living room.

The location of the mud room indicates an additional level of privacy. It is still a slightly public room as it was used for entertaining. However, it is located in a more secluded part of the house off the solarium hall. All visitors to the home that entered through the front door did not see the room. They were invited or were on such intimate relations with their hosts so as to venture into the room on their own. The room's décor also keeps it from being one of the primary civic rooms. Its natural materials indicate less formality than is evident in the main living room. Its size is also more intimate. Occupants of the room are forced to interact and are in close proximity to one another.

The private sitting room indicates another level of removal from the most public and civic spaces of the house. Its location, décor, and use make it a personal space (see Figure 18). It is at the end of the same wing on which the mud room is located and is even further from the main living room. It is also concealed behind a series of doors and placed at the end of another hallway, which is narrower than the solarium. Like the mud room, it is much smaller and more intimate in scale than the main living room. It has windows on two sides, including a bay window on its back wall that looks out onto the back of the property. Its walls are painted pale green and the floor is carpeted. The ceiling was originally covered with fabric.

The colors, textures, size, and location of the room indicate its status as among the more personal of the Penns' living spaces. The wall color is soothing and serene. The carpet softens the room and is less harsh than the living room's wooden floor and the mud room's stone one. Like previous rooms, this one also has a fireplace. The private sitting room adjoins the master bedroom. It is an intimate space the owners enjoyed apart from guests. Once the doors were





Figure 18. Chinqua-Penn manor house solarium hallway, Reidsville, North Carolina, 1996, *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*.

closed, the suite was shut off from the rest of the house, keeping guests and servants away.

Those outside the room cannot be seen or heard once the doors to the suite are shut.

The sitting room's size and furnishings are more typical of what one might find in a middle-class house. The sofas and chairs are modern for the time the room was decorated. They are covered in cream and blue chintz fabrics with cushions and foot stools. Photographs, books, and small trinkets are placed on the mantle, and built-in areas. A few years before her death, Mrs. Penn said, "This is where I really live."<sup>78</sup> It was certainly a more comfortable space for a couple or widow than the massive and impersonal formal living room. It also represents the staging area for entertaining that took place in the larger civic rooms like the dining room and main living room. The sitting room and bedroom were the places the Penns got dressed and prepared for their roles as host and hostess.

Each bedroom, including the master bedroom adjoining the sitting room, is more private than the other spaces used by owners, guests, and servants. Bedrooms are the most personal areas in the house, for each group of people who used them. Like the sitting room, the master bedroom is a personal space with a comfortable décor. Its walls and flooring are the same as those in the sitting room. It too has few furnishings in comparison with the mud room or main living room. It contains a sixteenth-century bed from Florence, Louis XV desk, bedside tables, and likely contained only a few chairs and additional tables when the Penns lived in it.<sup>79</sup> Like the sitting room, the location, small scale, and soothing décor of the master bedroom make it a highly personal and intimate space. The guest bedrooms above it are more accessible than the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 27.

owner's suite, but they still have a level of privacy built into them. The guest bedrooms are also on a similarly smaller scale than the civic spaces in the house.

A door is located at the end of the guest bedroom hallway. The hallway is around the corner from the stair hall in the upstairs portion of the house. Each bedroom is on the same side of the hall with windows opposite the doors. The bedrooms are called the Italian room, Empire room, French room, and Chinese room in order from the beginning of the hall, closest to the center of the house. Each room has a door leading into it with a space between it and an interior door. The first three rooms have another door equal distance from the exterior one. The space between the doors is as deep as the closets along the hallway placed between the rooms. The Chinese room is the last room on the hallway. Its door faces the hall's entrance. It has a longer space inside that runs perpendicular to the hall leading to the inner door. The inner and outer doors of each bedroom are louvered to allow the flow of air. The use of two doors provides a level of privacy that is absent with only one door. If one exits a bedroom, one can close the inner door before opening the outer door. This keeps the bedroom from being viewed by anyone passing along the hallway. The use of two doors and the space created by them insulates the rooms from the hallway and anyone who might be in it. Layers of seclusion are placed along this wing. The public center of the house leads to increasingly private, personal spaces designated by the location of the hall along the rear side of the house. The exterior doors of the bedrooms provide the next layer of concealment with the inner doors representing the most intimate and hidden spaces enjoyed by guests.

The décor of each guest bedroom is reflected in the names given to them. The Italian room has walls painted in a trompe l'oeil design that creates a false sense of depth. Delicate colors including pastel blues and pinks are used on the walls. A wing-backed sleigh bed and

eighteenth century Italian commode with a marble top are its primary furnishings. It is the only guest bedroom with an outdoor balcony. The balcony is also accessible from the velvet room. The Italian room adjoins the Empire room by a bathroom located between the two near the back of the rooms. Trompe l'oeil techniques are also utilized in this room. Gold and silver wallpaper columns were placed over painted walls to create a three dimensional effect. The floor mimics the walls with the same lines of gold and silver continued on the rug that covers most of the room. The furnishings are mainly Empire-style mahogany with gilt and marble pieces. Families likely stayed in these two rooms as they adjoined through the bathroom. The outer doors to the rooms could be shut, creating a suite.

The French room has French, art deco, and Chinese influences. Its walls are covered in silver paper that contains a green Chinese landscape design. The floors are covered in a green rug. Furnishings include a pair of silver French Art Deco lamps and a set classical French sleigh beds with a commode. This room has its own bathroom tiled in a popular Art Deco motif of pink and gold. The contradiction of Chinese and French styles is not surprising given the mix of cultures found elsewhere in the house. Décor reminiscent of Chinese styles was also popular in American rooms in the early twentieth century.

The Chinese bedroom has silver paper panels on the walls and black carpet (see Figure 19). The green-painted teakwood furniture was imported from China. It was copied from furniture owned by a friend of the Penns, Buster Brown, who lived in Shanghai.<sup>80</sup> The matching pieces include a pair of twin beds, vanity, chest of drawers, desk, chairs, lamps, and a bedside table. Various Asian prints, statues, and other objects of art adorn the room. The bathroom located within the room also has an Asian motif. The Chinese bedroom is the most secluded and private on the guest bedroom hallway. It is located at the end of the hall and has a smaller hall

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 33.



Figure 19. Chiqua-Penn manor house Chinese bedroom, Reidsville, North Carolina, 1996, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.

within its exterior door leading to it. This room has the same view of the back gardens as the master bedroom as it is directly above the owners' suite. The Penns' three nieces often visited Chinqua-Penn and liked staying in the Chinese room best.<sup>81</sup>

The only remaining guest bedroom is in a more public area of the house. The front guest bedroom is off the velvet room and has a view of the front of the property. The room has only one door leading inside and is decorated in a similar way to the Empire room. It has mahogany Empire-style furniture with gold and white striped drapes and a matching bedspread. The front guest room also has its own bathroom located inside it. This bedroom has a different view than the others and is also in a more prominent location than those on the guest bedroom hallway. Its large bay window facing the pagoda may be the reason this bedroom was a popular choice for the Penns' guests. The view as well, intriguing decorations, as well as the separation of this room from the guest bedroom hallway likely raised this room's status. It may have been used as a changing room or a rest room as it was the most accessible one from the library and music room. Based upon its use and location, the front guest room is a civic space rather than a private one.

The bedrooms enjoyed by the Penns and their guests differ greatly from those used by employees. These rooms were the most personal areas used by servants. The servants' hallway has three small bedrooms and one bathroom located off the hall. The bedrooms were used as offices during part of the house's stint as a museum and it is thus difficult to discern how they originally appeared. The bedrooms likely had little ornamentation. Certainly they lacked the ornate paint and wallpaper present in the guest bedrooms and are absent any extras like decorative moldings. They are also smaller in size than the guest or master bedrooms. They have closets inside them but no private bathrooms. Two of the bedrooms located next to each

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

other face another portion of the rear of the property. The third bedroom placed at the end of the hall has windows on one wall partially obstructed by a tree and the lower level of the house. The single bathroom has white tile on the floor and walls as well as white porcelain fixtures. The bathroom, like the bedrooms, is Spartan and plain. The rooms are functional, but not finely decorated. The servants were in the house to work, not to enjoy their surroundings.

The rooms used by employees on both levels were used as offices and gathering spaces when the mansion was open for tours. These areas were clearly viewed as unimportant in the interpretation of the house. The house's administrators believed that visitors were more interested in the opulent rooms used by the Penns and their guests than those occupied by servants. Museum employees acted as servants to the public and were thus placed in the servants' quarters out of sight. The daily lives of the Penns' servants are thus not well understood or documented.

The strict functionality of the servants' upstairs wing is similar to that found in their downstairs rooms. The servants' dining room and apartment on the first floor are also sparsely decorated. Staff and visitors utilized these rooms when the house was open as a museum, and thus it is also difficult to discern precisely what they looked like decades ago. The lack of photographs and eventual use of the rooms as offices indicate their low status. Still, the size and location of the rooms is telling. The bedrooms are small, like those upstairs. The servants' dining room is much smaller than the formal dining room. It has built-in metal glass front cabinets with synthetic countertops.

The size, placement, and décor of formal and informal dining and living spaces are similar in other large homes from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. It was typical for rich Americans to convey their wealth to visitors by displaying antiques and other rare or valuable

decorative art objects. European antique furniture like the pieces found at Chinqua-Penn was popular, as was the implementation of wall-coverings, window treatments, and other elements that conveyed familiarity with the trends and styles of other countries. Photographs of the interior of country houses from the same time period illustrate this point (see Figure 20). It seems an informal checklist of necessary furnishings circulated amongst the owners of country houses. Similar pieces, mainly from Europe, including tapestries, sofas, and wood paneling, appear in many images of these homes.

The acquisition of the necessary adornments for country houses took time, money, and often, expensive trips. Thus the showcasing of such treasures demonstrated the wealth and culture of their owners in their ability to travel and collect. Jeff and Betsy Penn's finances were substantial, though exact numbers are not evident. Mr. Penn and his brother Charlie each received \$15,000 from their father's will. He and Charlie were executors and in charge of parceling out the other four sums of \$15,000 to their remaining siblings. It is also known that when Jeff Penn's mother died, his sister Pearl received \$23,198.45. Jeff's share was likely the same amount.<sup>82</sup> Mr. Penn invested in numerous companies including Penn Carrig & Co. Mrs. Penn was also an investor. She and Mr. Penn were investors in the Klot Silk Company that briefly operated in Reidsville.<sup>83</sup> Mrs. Penn's holdings in the Niagara Falls Power Company were surely substantial, but exact figures are not known. The Niagara Share Corporation was worth \$215,760,000 when the Schoellkopf family dissolved it in 1992.<sup>84</sup> At the time of his

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<sup>82</sup> Audrey Michie, biographical sketch of Thomas Jefferson Penn, 4 July 1994, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>83</sup> Frank R. Penn, interview by Audrey Michie, 7 February 1995, transcript typed, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>84</sup> "Paul Schoellkopf, Jr. Monument." Page from the website "Buffalo as an Architectural Museum." 27 October 2004 < <http://ah.bfn.org/a/forestL/schoelP/index.html> >.





a.



b.

Figure 20. a.) Knollwood, East Norwich, New York, Charles I. Hudson Residence, 1906-1920, *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*.  
b.) The Chimneys, Mill Neck, New York, Mrs. C. Porter Wilson Residence, 1928, *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects, 1860-1940*.

retirement from Gardner, Penn & Co Mr. Penn's holdings in the company were \$83,430.55.

According to tax documents, Jeff Penn owed \$10,000 in taxes in 1945. Many of his financial assets were tied up in trusts and his stewardship of family money.<sup>85</sup>

The Penns, like other wealthy Americans, spent much of their time and money on travel. They enjoyed relatively unchecked finances to build and fill their homes until the early 1900s. Income tax was not instituted until 1913. This likely slowed much of the spending on houses, trips, and collecting. Income tax also accounts for the downsizing of homes evident even in those of the rich. The Penns were wealthy enough to build Chinqua-Penn, travel extensively, and amass a collection of art objects even after the tax took effect. Traveling was a passion for the Penns as well as their rich peers. It was common to take the grand tour to Europe for weddings, after college, and at other times. These trips provided occasions to purchase furnishings for homes. The Penns took two world tours and several smaller trips to six continents. During their first trip together, the couple purchased items for their home.<sup>86</sup>

There was also a deeper meaning in their journeys. According to Jeff Penn, "if you actually 'put your heart in the other fellow's hands,' open the doors of your mind, and welcome different viewpoints, try to curb your prejudices concerning customs, politics, and religion, you will not only make your going anywhere abroad Big, but you will come home a much Broader, Better American citizen."<sup>87</sup> To Penn, traveling connected him with others and enriched his life. Penn believed each time he returned home he was a more enlightened person than when he left and had the material art objects and furnishings to prove it.

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<sup>85</sup> Audrey Michie, biographical sketch of Thomas Jefferson Penn, 4 July 1994, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>86</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 8.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

The Penns were not alone in their acquisition of fine art and furniture. The collection of decorative art objects exploded in the early part of the twentieth century. Many prominent collectors felt inspired to accrue pieces of Americana at the close of World War I. Men like Henry Francis du Pont and Henry Ford spent years building collections of American decorative arts that were eventually displayed to the public. Ford hoped to rebuild his family's collection while du Pont sought to amass one of his own. Each man purchased pieces to display in their homes.<sup>88</sup> Collector J.P. Morgan became president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1904. He spent his lifetime amassing artifacts and works of art from around the world. During his tenure, the museum acquired pieces from Greece, Egypt, and China.<sup>89</sup> The Metropolitan's American Wing opened in 1924. The wing housed various early American furnishings and art objects and was the result of years of collecting and donations. The museum held its first exhibition of American decorative arts in 1909.<sup>90</sup> This further spurred the desire of Americans with monetary means to collect art objects.

The eclecticism represented by such an exhibition reflected a similar trend among wealthy homeowners who delighted in filling their homes with their own types of period rooms. This notion of placing period rooms within one's house is reflected in a different way at Chinqua-Penn. The styles of foreign cultures were tantalizing for people like the Penns and many of their contemporaries. They had the means to travel, exert American dominance in other countries, and amass impressive collections. Wealthy Americans were able to display this ability with objects and decorative ideas in their homes that reflected the cultures they explored.

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<sup>88</sup> Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 126.

<sup>89</sup> Edward P. Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), 32.

<sup>90</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Curators of the American Wing, A Walk Through the American Wing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), vii.

Far from simply appreciating American artifacts and history, the Penns embraced the background of the world.

Collectors like Jeff and Betsy Penn traveled the globe, showing power and prestige over other nations in their acquisition of all things extravagant. Biltmore Estate provides an extreme example of this consumption. As befitting of an American country house built to resemble a French chateau, many of the furnishings and décor of Biltmore are European. It is similar to Chinqua-Penn in this way as the furnishings were largely imported, rather than domestic. Intricate brocades, tapestries, and rugs adorn the house. The Vanderbilts also collected Renaissance paintings. Louis XIV furnishings appear in bedrooms and other areas of the house. The Vanderbilt family was an American institution with much greater wealth and prestige than the Penns or Schoellkopfs. However, their taste for other cultures was similar to that of Mr. and Mrs. Penn. Each family went beyond the art and finery of America to consume decorative arts from other parts of the world. This evidences an American worldview of the elite that the finest objects and ideas flowed forth from Europe. Copying the styles of Europeans and translating them into American ones had the desired effect of conveying the refined taste of families like the Vanderbilts.

The consumption of the finest materials from other cultures indicates the sense of American exceptionalism prominent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This desire to consume the finest offerings of other countries was exhibited by the Penns and their contemporaries. In Chinqua-Penn, the couple created a showcase of their wealth, power, and refinement in its design and furnishings. They demonstrated American dominance on an international scale, and their own status over their servants in the placement and décor of the rooms in their home.

## CHAPTER 4: THE GROUNDS

The setting for country houses was almost as essential as the architecture. Chinqua-Penn Plantation originally consisted of approximately 1,000 acres. This was mainly farmland owned by Jeff Penn's family. Jeff and Betsy Penn utilized approximately 25 acres to develop their house and grounds, while the remaining property served as pasture and farmland. Construction of the house and outbuildings was completed in 1930.

As defined in *American Estates and Gardens of 1904*, the country house was "a new type of dwelling, a sumptuous house, built at large expense, often palatial in dimensions, furnished in the richest manner and placed on an estate."<sup>91</sup> The grounds of Chinqua-Penn are indicative of the standards established by other American country houses. The landscape was also divided into three sections representing civic, personal, and support spaces. Many earlier country houses were meant to have viable farms on their property in addition to areas used for recreation. The surrounding land that often set an estate apart from a mansion or city home. Chinqua-Penn's property was originally a cattle farm. Most of the land remained as such following the development of a portion of it for a residence. Stables, shooting ranges, and greenhouses were common in European and American country estates and were also found at Chinqua-Penn. Recreation was particularly important in American versions and was exemplified in ways that were unique to the United States. While some pursuits like horseback riding and shooting were enjoyed in Europe and the United States, swimming in private pools like the one at Chinqua-Penn, was distinctly American.<sup>92</sup> The Penns' home has other unique and eclectic features as evidenced in its various structures and gardens.

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<sup>91</sup> Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), vi.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

The grounds of Chinqua-Penn denote varying levels of privacy like those found in the house (see Figure 2). The lodges at the front of the property indicate the first barrier from the world outside the home. These acted as support spaces as employees lived and worked in the lodges. Visitors must pass through one of two gated drives between the lodges to enter the property. The lodges were mainly used for employee residences and workspaces. These structures are very modest in relation to the Penns' home at the top of the driveway. Some of the simplest conveniences found in the manor house are lacking in the lodges. The lodges had no interior stairs. Employees had to go outside in order to reach different stories. The facades are also much simpler than those created for the manor house. There are no expanses of stone on the buildings, or special entryways. The entrances to these structures are humble and unadorned wooden doors. Beyond them is a larger gate that was likely never closed. It acts as another gateway through which guests pass on their way to the house. Employees who lived in these buildings were far removed from the house. Their placement at the front of the property near the road indicates their duty as barriers to the outside world. Guests, owners, and employees entering the front of the property had to pass the dwellings of residential employees as well as through gates, to visit the house and grounds.

The front of the property closest to the road and near the lodges is mainly grass-covered and interspersed with a few trees including oaks and evergreens. The area along the driveway leading up to the house is wooded on both sides. The trees are less dense at the top of the drive where it forks to the front or rear of the home. A few trees are located around the front and sides and a field with some trees is off the right wing. There are landscaped gardens behind the mansion and larger fields beyond them. Other wooded areas are present a few hundred yards behind the house.

The home is at the center of the property and the lodge buildings are at the foot of the drive at the front entrance to the residential portion of the land. The drive forms a circle in front of the house. Within the circle is a fountain depicting cupid shooting an arrow of water into the air. The cupid stands in a circular pool of water with an ornate lead rim. A stone path with steps leads away from the fountain and the house toward the swimming pool. Two massive stone animals face each other on either side of the walkway where it reaches the pool area. The pool is rectangular and has flat stones and tile work laid a few feet around its rim. A pagoda-style structure is on the far side of the pool facing the house (see Figure 21). Stone steps lead up to the building. It has a tile roof and wooden sides with stone supports. The floor is tiled. The walls have openings but no glass windows. The interior walls and ceiling are painted in Chinese designs. Originally, the pagoda held statues and other art objects.

The lower level of the pagoda is accessible from the back of the building. It is on a lower portion of the ground and is not visible from the front of the structure. A balcony made of stone with red-painted wood railing surrounds the pagoda. Stone steps lead from this promenade to the lower level. The bottom portion contains two divided halves with changing rooms and showers. Trees surround this part of the structure. The pagoda was used as a bath house for those using the pool as well as a teahouse for entertaining and is thus a civic space.



Figure 21. Chiqua-Penn pagoda, Reidsville, North Carolina, architect unknown, 1932, *Chiqua-Penn Plantation*.



The presence of the fountain, pagoda, and pool at the top of the driveway informs guests of the opulence found inside the mansion. These structures set the stage for what guests encountered during their stay. The ornate décor of the pagoda and the fine statues around it work in a similar way to the furnishings in the house. They demonstrated the Penns' ability to travel the world. The cost of purchasing, shipping, and unloading some of the objects was surely massive. The stone horse and camel, flanking the walkway to the pool, weigh several tons each and required extensive labor and cost to reach their destination at Chinqua-Penn. The fountain of cupid at the front of the house was purchased in Paris.<sup>93</sup>

The lush and largely informal landscape at Chinqua-Penn also conveys the wealth of its owners. Approximately 25 acres around the house were professionally designed to set off the house in the manner the Penns desired. Landscape firm W.E. Harries and A.V. Hall was hired by the Penns to plan and construct the residential grounds. The firm was based in Buffalo, New York. W.E. Harries was Buffalo's superintendent of parks from 1916 to 1918 before opening his private firm. He was known for designing golf courses.<sup>94</sup> Mr. Penn expressed concern about the exorbitant cost of bringing such professionals back and forth from New York. In a 1923 letter to his friend and surveyor, he wrote "I now intend being in Reidsville on Friday morning with a very high priced landscape man, the architect, etc., etc. What I am trying to do, Sam, is to stop these expensive trips from the North to the South to get any little bit of measurement that all these fellows seem to demand ..."<sup>95</sup> Penn previously considered others including New Jersey firm Bobbink and Atkins. In response to their estimate, Penn replied "... even your lowest estimate for planting around my Country Place in North Carolina is so far beyond my means or

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<sup>93</sup> "Tour for Museum Teachers," archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>94</sup> Marvin S. Kadet, "W. E. Harries Dies; Designed Area Golf Courses," *Buffalo Evening News*, 25 May 1972.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to S.B. Dameron, Reidsville, North Carolina, 27 August 27 1923, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

what I am willing to spend that I think you had better not consider the place any further, please."<sup>96</sup> Similar letters were written to other landscape architects deemed too expensive, including J.H. Phillips of New York.<sup>97</sup>

Penn's structural architect, H.C. Ingalls, best summarized what the landscaping should involve. He told Penn "I would avoid any formal landscape treatment except in the laying out of the rose garden or flower garden immediately adjacent to the house. In those two features, a little formality would be an interesting variation from the otherwise natural treatment of the grounds."<sup>98</sup> This informality coupled with formal treatments in some of the gardens reflects the same dichotomy represented in the house. The rural, rustic façade of the house is at odds with its more formal interior.

Manicured spaces are mainly located behind the house. These spaces are thus more private than the front entrance. Only guests allowed inside the house or into the back of the property saw these areas. Chinqua-Penn's gardens boast numerous types of flowers and plants. They demonstrate that the Penns had the means to employ workers to create and maintain them. The formal gardens are behind the wing of the house containing the main living room. They are adjacent to one side of the rear wing that holds the mud room and owner's suite. The garden is linear and extends in rows from the back of the house. It has two grassy walkways with plants in between and on either side of them. A stone patio is between the back of the house and the formal gardens. It has a fountain in the center of the patio with a low stone wall around the edges of it. The tiled dance terrace is next to the patio at the corner of the house between two wings. It is visible from the front parlor and accessible from a door in the mud room. A massive

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, to Bobbink and Atkins, Rutherford, New Jersey, 23 July 1923, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>97</sup> "Landscapers" file, 1923-1925, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

<sup>98</sup> Harry Creighton Ingalls, New York, New York, to Thomas Jefferson Penn, Buffalo, New York, 24 July 1923, archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

urn with two statues of Greek gods on either side is at the end of the gardens, facing the house. The porch behind the owners' suite looks out onto the formal gardens.

The formal garden and back of the house represents its most elegant and refined space. The back façade of the wing containing the formal living room has a massive bay window, stone balconies, picture window, patio, dance terrace, and fountain. These features are complimented by the manicured formal garden and statuary beyond them. This area is much different in its form from the front of the house. It conveys a much greater sense of formality and wealth than the more natural landscaping and unassuming front façade of the house. The formal gardens are visible from the main living room, entrance hall, mud room, and owners' suite on the first floor of the house. They are also visible from the velvet room and guest bedrooms from the second floor of the house. The views for the Penns and their guests from living rooms and bedrooms were of an elegant, manicured garden.

A smaller garden is located outside the breakfast room. The rose garden has a small fountain in the center with rose bushes surrounding it. The roses are accessible from the patio outside the solarium and breakfast room. This garden is smaller and is nestled between two wings of the house. It is also secluded from other areas by trees and bushes. This space lacks the large fountains and statuary of the formal garden. The rose bushes are also more organic and less tailored in appearance than the other garden's precise rows and lawns.

A vegetable garden is behind the servants' wing of the house. It is near the screened porch entrance at the back of the house. It is also secluded from view by trees and shrubs, some of which it shares with the rose garden. The vegetable garden consists of small plots with narrow walkways between them. It is an informal space that provided food for the house and was thus a support area. The garden's size, location, and lack of patios and adornments make it

more suited to practical harvesting rather than entertaining. This garden is simple and small in comparison to the rose garden and formal garden and is a support space as it was used for food rather than decoration.

The cut flower garden is further away from the house and was also a support space. It consists of several rows and sections of flower varieties with walkways in between. These flowers were cut and placed in the house. This garden is larger than the other two, but is more free-flowing in its layout. This area was likely used for growing and harvesting plants rather than entertaining and recreation.

Other plants were grown in the Lutton greenhouses. These acted as a further support space in which plants were nurtured in a tropical climate. The greenhouses are located through the woods, a few dozen yards from the driveway halfway to the house. They consist of three greenhouse buildings connected with a central room. A basement is beneath this room. Exotic plants and flowers were grown in the greenhouses and placed in the main house throughout the year.<sup>99</sup> This space, while beautiful, was functional and was visible from the driveway, through the trees. It was a part of the support elements used by employees to maintain the manor house.

The windmill was a place that existed solely for entertaining. It was constructed in 1931, approximately 400 yards behind the manor house. The windmill was built to pump water, but was never functional. Instead it was a popular site for barbecues and parties. Its interior walls were painted blue, red, and yellow with pieces of brass and tile work adorning them. A tap room and bar were located on the first floor. The second story held dressing rooms and was painted with burlesque images reminiscent of playhouses in Montmartre, France. The images were inspired by the paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec. The windmill was eventually lost to fire in 1943,

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<sup>99</sup> Susan-Cline Cordonier, ed., *Chinqua-Penn Plantation*, (Reidsville: Chinqua-Penn Plantation Foundation, Inc., 1996), 37.

though the hearth and walkway to the site remain intact. The space represented an important private area for entertainment at Chinqua-Penn. Stories of risqué parties circulated among employees while the structure was in use.<sup>100</sup> The windmill served as a playhouse for the Penns and their guests and was placed at a distance from the servants. It was an extension of the private spaces of the house that acted as sets for the Penns to play hosts to their wealthy and well-traveled friends and family.

A shooting range is built into the ground in a field off the right wing of the house that includes a skeet machine. Gentlemen guests enjoyed practicing their shots. Mrs. Penn enjoyed this outdoor lifestyle as well. She was fond of animals and rode horses for much of her life. The couple also had several cocker spaniels that were buried in a dog cemetery located at the back of the property.

Several of the spaces on the grounds denote support areas. Such locations provided additional locations for entertaining guests, escaping the house, and aiding in the work of employees. Mr. and Mrs. Penn and their guests used some of these civic spaces. These include the swimming pool, pagoda, formal and rose gardens, and windmill. Employees utilized support areas, including the greenhouses and vegetable garden, to maintain the lifestyle enjoyed by the Penns.

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<sup>100</sup> Carolyn Brady, compilation of material regarding the windmill, Archives, Chinqua-Penn Plantation, Reidsville, North Carolina.

## CONCLUSION

Chinqua-Penn Plantation is a physical documentation of how spaces and people were structured by wealthy Americans in the early twentieth century. Dividing the house into three realms, personal, civic, and support, provides the categories into which each aspect of life fits. It also provides a new system of categorization with which to examine other houses.

Homes are the ultimate subjects of material culture analysis. Examining them through close description and the methodology prescribed by scholars like Jules Prown and Clifford Geertz unlocks the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of those who designed, owned, and lived in them. Architecture, floor plans, and interior décor indicate the tastes of the house's occupants. Such elements reveal popular trends in society. They provide a microcosm of life in the period of time they were created and inhabited. Among the more important findings in such case studies is the ordering of people within houses. Chinqua-Penn Plantation is an example of this ordering.

Architectural elements, as well as the floor plan of the house, indicate the status of people within it. The most personal spaces enjoyed by owners and servants were located at extreme ends of the manor house. The exterior architecture of the house denotes the importance of the Penns while it conceals the work of servants and employees. The entrance used by the Penns is on the front of the house, at its most central and visible point. The servants' entrance is hidden behind a wall, down a curved drive on the back end of the house. From the front, the servants' wing of the house is visibly diminished compared to other portions. The only branch more hidden from the front of the house is the rear wing containing the owners' suite. This indicates the Penns' desire for privacy and removal from other areas and people. A stone covered porch

opens off the end of this wing overlooking the formal gardens. The servants had a screened porch overlooking the vegetable garden for their recreation.

Varying degrees of personal, civic, and support spaces are also found within the house. The front entrance gives way to the most civic or public areas. These include the front entry hall and formal living room. Near the center of the house in the other front-facing wing are the formal dining room and breakfast room. The scale and location of these rooms indicate their use primarily for entertaining and for the Penns. The formal living room is the largest room in the house. Its size, placement near the front door, and décor indicate its use for impressing visitors. The Penns played lord and lady of Chinqua-Penn in this space. The European-inspired furnishings indicate the wealth and power of the Penns and their contemporaries in the United States in the 1920s. Their desire to collect objects from other countries demonstrates the American belief that the world belonged to wealthy US citizens. The living room represents this consumption and is the most civic area of the house.

Above these rooms are the velvet or music room, the front guest bedroom, and the library. They are also spaces utilized for entertainment, but are smaller and further removed from the primary civic areas below. The mud room is also a step away from the highly civic spaces and is more personal. It is located down the back wing of the house, away from the front entrance and accompanying rooms. The mud room is smaller, more intimate, and its décor is rustic with exposed beams on the walls and ceiling, as well as a stone floor. Its use for intimate gatherings makes it more private and personal than the formal living room.

The owners' suite and upstairs bedrooms are the private areas of the house. The placement of the suite at the end of the solarium hall, behind a series of doors makes it secluded from guests and servants. It represents the personal staging area for the Penns in which they

prepared to entertain their guests in the civic locations. These rooms, like the mud room, are more intimate in size and décor. They are carpeted with somewhat humble furnishings such as chintz covered chairs and sofas and warm, soft colors. The guest bedroom hallway is a personal space used by guests. It is also in the back wing of the house and is thus removed from primary entertainment areas. The rooms are concealed behind double doors, hiding the people and contents from view.

The servants' wing was much less formally decorated than the owners' suite or guest bedrooms. It also has an interior hall lacking windows and only one bathroom for its three bedrooms, as opposed to the bath in every room in the guest bedroom hallway. The servants' rooms were likely plain like the bathroom that was covered in white tile with white porcelain and chrome fixtures. The butlers' pantry, kitchen, and servants' dining room on the first floor were equally plain and utilitarian. Painted metal cupboards and shelves with simple tables and chairs were likely the only furnishings in these areas.

The placement and décor of the spaces in Chinqua-Penn are demonstrated in other American homes as well. Chinqua-Penn reflects larger trends of concealing servants' spaces and placing them in areas far removed from the rest of the house. Entertainment or civic areas are also typically in the front and central portions of the homes with owners' bedrooms separated from them. Architectural elements that convey class and order at Chinqua-Penn are also evident in these places. This ordering of space occurs on the grounds of such homes as well.

Studying Chinqua-Penn reveals the values and beliefs of its owners relating to classes of people. It also indicates the Penns' desire to appear different from their peers in the location and architectural style of their home. This style is not identical to other houses, though some elements of it are. The use of natural materials to blend with the environment was popular in



country houses constructed elsewhere. The European influence evidenced in its manor house façade is also typical. Mr. and Mrs. Penns' wishes for uniqueness end in the décor and floor plan of their house. Though the Y shape is not standard, the type of rooms and their relation to each other is found in numerous other homes built by wealthy Americans following the turn of the century. Thus, the elements incorporated at Chinqua-Penn are reflective of the ideas and beliefs of the larger society. Chinqua-Penn is not an anomaly, but has much in common with other American homes of its scale and time period. The search for individuality manifested itself in a home much like those found around the United States. Each is unique, but most share similar fundamental elements of design to serve the class-specific tastes and desires of their owners.

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